

**DANGER ON WHEELS** THE RV TIRES  
YOU MUST AVOID

**ORGANIZING  
SECRETS FROM  
THE PROS**

SEPTEMBER 2021

# CR Consumer Reports®

✓ **REVIEWS & RATINGS**

Refrigerators .....  
Dishwashers .....  
Exercise Equipment .....  
Leaf Blowers .....  
Desktop Computers .....  
Pillows .....  
Hybrid SUVs .....

## REFRESH YOUR KITCHEN

Smart New Ways to Save

Transform  
old cabinets for  
under \$300

Replace worn  
countertops with low-cost  
laminates

Get a great  
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Install  
affordable  
waterproof  
wood-look  
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Simple, affordable ways to give yours a fresh new look.

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# CR's Handy New Home App



HOMEOWNERSHIP IS AN incredible achievement. And when you're handed the keys to your home, it can even feel as if you've won a race.

But as many of us have learned, the work has only just begun at that moment: The race, it turns out, is actually a lifelong marathon of maintenance. From fixing your appliances to refinishing your deck, these tasks can be annoying and complex,

and many homeowners don't even know where to start. So we sometimes put off projects until it's too late—and the cost of setting things right starts spinning out of control.

That's why, in July, Consumer Reports released Upkept, our new home maintenance app. One of the trickiest parts of maintaining a home is simply knowing what to do and when to do it. Upkept will propose a plan for keeping everything in good shape, and automatically schedule (and gently remind you about) tasks throughout the year.

And, like this month's cover story on kitchen renovation, on page 26, the app can make you a smarter homeowner as well. Users will learn the best time to tackle DIY projects and get step-by-step instructions and expert tips for doing them right. The app even tells you when a job is best left to a professional. And all of this is powered by the independent, test-driven, consumer-focused experts at CR—a source you can trust.

Upkept is now available for download through the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. Or go to [upkepthome.com](http://upkepthome.com) for more information. And please send feedback to [upkept@cr.consumer.org](mailto:upkept@cr.consumer.org), so we can keep improving the app in the months ahead.

Upkept might not make home maintenance your favorite pastime. But it will make the marathon easier, giving you the peace of mind to enjoy all the wonderful things about your home.

*Marta Tellado*

**Marta L. Tellado,**  
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## Cleaning Up Credit Reports

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

In our March issue, we told you about the launch of our Credit Checkup project. Almost 6,000 people volunteered to check their credit reports and let us know what they found.

Now we have results to share: More than a third of the volunteers told us they discovered at least one error, and about 1 in 10 said they found errors related to their financial data, such as payments wrongly reported as late. This underscores a 2021 nationally representative CR survey in which 12 percent of people who had ever checked their credit reports said they found errors.

Such errors can hurt your credit, keep you from securing a loan, and even prevent you from getting a job, an apartment, or affordable insurance.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

In June, CR testified to Congress about these concerns, suggesting ways to make the industry more fair and transparent. And we're calling on the three big credit bureaus—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—to take specific steps to ensure that reports are accurate, including full, timely investigations of all consumer disputes. We're also pressing for free and easy access to reports and scores—because you shouldn't have to pay to look at your own data.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign our petition to the credit bureaus at [CR.org/credit0921](https://CR.org/credit0921).

## Establishing a Right to Repair

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

When a product breaks down, consumers often have to make an unnecessarily painful

decision: Pay an unreasonable amount to get it running again, or buy another one.

The problem is that manufacturers of products ranging from smartphones and laptops to autos and home appliances sometimes make it difficult or impossible to get those products repaired by independent technicians. By restricting access to basic diagnostic information, tools, and replacement parts needed to make repairs, manufacturers force consumers to rely on the company itself or its hand-picked servicers—options that dramatically limit consumer choice and can cost far more. Some manufacturers even refuse to fix their devices, so people have no choice but to buy a new one.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR has long advocated for “right to repair” laws that would guarantee consumers a right to have their devices fixed by a servicer of their choice. We led the drafting of model legislation that served as the basis for right-to-repair bills that have been under



### PROGRESS UPDATE

On June 23, the U.S. House approved, in a bipartisan vote, the STURDY Act, which—if passed by the Senate and signed into law—would help prevent child injuries and deaths from tip-overs of dressers and other clothing storage units by establishing a national rule for furniture stability. CR testing over several years has proved that it's possible to make affordable and stable furniture, and we've worked with parent advocates, companies, and policymakers to ensure strong, mandatory standards. Go to [CR.org/sturdy0921](https://CR.org/sturdy0921) to urge your senators to pass the STURDY Act.

consideration in 27 states, and for a new federal version introduced in June by Rep. Joseph Morelle, D-N.Y.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Go to [house.gov](https://house.gov) to urge your representative to support the federal Fair Repair Act.

## Protecting Your Privacy

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Many consumers, according to a nationally representative CR survey, are concerned about the amount of data that companies such as Amazon and Google can possess about them, which can include info like birthdays, real-time location, ethnicity, job status, and shopping history.

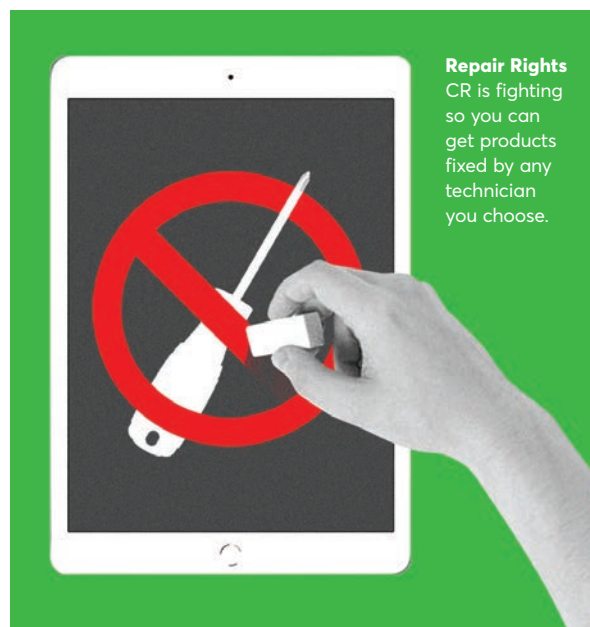
### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

To help consumers get control over such data, CR is working to establish “rules of the road” for online privacy. And though efforts to pass federal rules have stalled, gains have been made in several states.

We helped advance the landmark privacy law in California that went into effect in 2020, and are pushing to strengthen a Virginia measure that will take effect in 2023. Colorado is the third state to take action. In July, its governor signed a law giving residents the right to delete personal data collected by companies, and to stop them from selling such data in the future. CR testified at hearings on the bill and worked with lawmakers to improve it. Before the bill goes into effect in 2023, CR will urge legislators to add further protections, including making sure consumers can't be charged for exercising their privacy rights.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn more about CR's work to help you protect your privacy and hold tech companies accountable at [lab.CR.org](https://lab.CR.org).







Our July 2021 article “**The Hidden Danger of Big Trucks**” investigated the safety risks that large pickup trucks pose to pedestrians and other drivers on the road. Here, our readers share their experiences and concerns. To add your voice to the discussion, go to [CR.org/truck0921](https://www.consumerreports.org/truck0921).

MY SON was almost run over [on his] first day of kindergarten by a super large red pickup. The truck was first in line, and my car was second. I saw the teacher cross in front of the truck leading a line of kindergartners. As soon as the truck driver thought the last kid was by, she started to roll her wheels. I had the most horrible feeling and screamed “Stop!” at the top of my lungs. She did, and out from behind her bumper came a little blond head: my son.  
—Patty Kennedy, via Facebook

A NOT SO HIDDEN danger with these trucks: The headlights are mounted so high off the ground that when a truck is behind a smaller car, its headlights shine straight into the rearview mirror. The driver in the small car is almost blinded.  
—Michael Edises, Concord, CA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *Though there are limits on the amount of glare all headlights are allowed to produce and many states limit the height to which they can be mounted, the mismatch in height between full-sized pickups and lower vehicles can indeed put a significant amount of light right into a smaller car’s rearview mirror. Those mismatches have become more prevalent as more people opt for larger trucks. If*

*you can’t safely pull over to let a truck pass, temporarily adjust your rearview mirror.*

I’M VERY TROUBLED by how big trucks have become in recent years. As your article suggests, it’s about marketing and profit, but from a usability standpoint, I don’t see how bigger is any more usable. Trucks are so tall it’s as though you need a forklift to get anything into or out of the bed. It’s nuts. A word of caution: Manufacturers need to be held accountable for defects and flaws, but how someone uses the product is on them, not the manufacturer. We need safe drivers, not products that attempt to compensate for unsafe drivers.  
—Paul Novelli, Granbury, TX

I APPRECIATE YOUR article about the danger of large trucks. The size of these vehicles poses additional risks, including in parking lots: Being in an average sedan and having a large truck parked on either side makes pulling out of a space dangerous. Vision to either side is minimal. Everybody has the right to drive what they want, but my concern is this will continue to cause accidents and injuries. If you’re riding around by yourself, do you really need a vehicle this large?  
—Bill Ladas, Newburyport, MA

YOUR ARTICLE on big trucks made me think of my cycling experiences over the years. Truckers, at least those around here, are notoriously aggressive, often speed up to pass cyclists, and pass too closely. Cyclists usually pay a higher price for a vehicle encounter, and drivers are poorly educated about cycling laws. (Yes, some cyclists are irresponsible and disregard their own safety rules.) Isn’t that all the more reason to carefully negotiate around cyclists?  
—William J. Phillips, Auburn, ME

I DON’T OWN a pickup, but I think the onus [is on] the pedestrian to cross the street safely. I was taught to look both ways (and then look again). If you are in a crosswalk, you can be right—but you don’t want to be dead right.  
—Charles Grant, Gilbert, AZ



COVID-19  
IMMUNITY

YOUR ARTICLE “Living the New Normal” (July 2021) made no mention of the 35-plus million Americans who have already been infected with the COVID-19 virus and are naturally immune. Your article treats



WRITE

Go to  
[CR.org/lettertoeditor](https://www.consumerreports.org/lettertoeditor)  
to share your comments  
for publication.

this population no differently than the non-immune, non-vaccinated population. The article should say “immune” and “non-immune” rather than “vaccinated” and “non-vaccinated.” I realize this is the official Centers for Disease Control and Prevention position, but I have always looked to CR for better and more complete information than our government provides.

—Steve Davis, Eglin AFB, FL

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *It's true that people who have recovered from COVID-19 have some natural immunity. But the immune system's response to a SARS-CoV-2 infection is unpredictable, and some of the COVID-19 variants emerging recently can reinfect those who have already suffered from the virus. So far, experts tell CR, the evidence suggests that the immune system boost from vaccines is stronger and longer-lasting than the natural response to COVID-19. That's why the CDC continues to recommend that people who have recovered from COVID-19 still get vaccinated.*

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## AVOID BURNS & BITES

**REGARDING** “Easy Ways to Protect Your Skin in Summer” (July 2021): The last time you rated sunscreens, a Trader Joe’s spray was at the top. This time it is not even in the rankings. I have been using it with confidence. Now I am worried that I should stop using it.

—Mike Chiapetto,  
Colorado Springs, CO

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *Some previously tested sunscreens have been discontinued or, as is the case with Trader Joe’s Spray SPF 50+, reformulated. We couldn’t get the reformulated product in time to include in our July issue, but we’re testing it now and hope to share those results this fall.*

AS A BLACK WOMAN, I have found my sunscreen needs particularly hard to meet without having to spend more money and time—and I’m still not able to find a sunscreen that isn’t ashy or doesn’t leave a purple cast. Historically, the African American community has been excluded from the beauty/skincare conversation.

—Faith Maya Owtonda, Baltimore

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *You're right to be concerned about the sunscreen you wear: The sun's damaging ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause skin cancer in Black people as well as those with light skin. While choosing a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 is a primary consideration, finding a product that also looks good and feels comfortable is important: “The biggest concern I hear from my patients with darker skin is about the cosmetic appearance of the sunscreen once it's applied,” says Jenna Lester, MD, an assistant professor of dermatology and director of the Skin of Color Program at the University*



## WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO MAKE HOT WINGS?

**Regarding** “CR Cook-Off: The Best Way to Make Hot Wings at Home” (Insights, July 2021): I put mine in a casserole dish with the sauce and bake them low and slow. They don’t get crispy, but everything slides off the bones. (The longer you cook them, the spicier they get, so be careful if you like to marinate your wings.)

—@dkscreates,  
via Instagram

I’ve been air-frying mine for a year, and I will never do them any other way now. They come out perfect every time.

—Matt Smith,  
via Facebook

I prefer grilled!

—@theylovegeovanna,  
via Instagram

Turn on the oven. Prep a cookie sheet with foil, spray it, and put wings on it. I spread on all of my favorite spices and then bake them. Yum!

—Patricia Whittom  
Lamagno, via Facebook

of California, San Francisco. We recently asked a panel of CR staffers that included people of color to test a selection of CR-rated sunscreens. Most told us that they were not satisfied with how the mineral sunscreens absorbed into their skin and left a white cast. They also found that some of the chemical sunscreens, including Alba Botanica Hawaiian Coconut Clear Spray SPF 50, were better at absorbing into skin and didn’t leave behind a white residue. For more details on our testing, go to [CR.org/skintone0921](https://www.consumerreports.org/skintone0921).

IN YOUR insect repellent product update, you omitted treating clothing with permethrin. It is excellent. Follow directions carefully; permethrin should never be used on bare skin.

—Drew Broedsky, Osterville, MA

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *We don't currently test permethrin-treated clothing in our labs, but other research has shown that it can be an effective insecticide, particularly against ticks. It's true that you mustn't apply it directly to skin: Instead, buy clothing pretreated with permethrin or treat your clothes with permethrin spray outdoors. Be sure to wait at least 2 hours to dry completely before wearing.*



## STORM-READY

AFTER THREE fire evacuations, I built a “go bag” (“Stay Safe in Any Storm,” July 2021). My husband and I have one big bag with emergency & first aid kits, important docs, and more. Each kid also has their own backpack with a change of clothes, water bottle, whistle, and pump flashlight. So much peace of mind once I had them packed!

—@mrshappilymarried,  
via Instagram

# What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

*In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.*

## Video Doorbells

**WE TESTED:** 23 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Quality of a model's video in regular and low light, the availability of smart features and functions, how quickly it alerts you to motion, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
Median: 58  
Range: 28-83

**BEST OVERALL & GEOFENCING CAPABLE**  
**Nest Hello Video Doorbell**  
(works with Alexa & Google)  
\$230

**83**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**OFFERS COLOR NIGHT VISION**  
**Logitech Circle View Doorbell**  
961-000484 (works with  
Apple Smart Home)  
\$200

**81**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**BARGAIN BUY WITH EXCELLENT VIDEO QUALITY**  
**Wisenet SmartCam D1**  
(works with Alexa & Google)  
\$50

**80**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Backpack Leaf Blowers

**WE TESTED:** 10 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How quickly and quietly a model can move leaves and other debris on a lawn.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
**GAS**  
Median: 78; Range: 66-84  
**BATTERY**  
Median: 82; Range: 82-83

**EXCELLENT GAS BLOWER**  
**Husqvarna 350BT**  
\$320

**84**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**POWERFUL BATTERY BLOWER**  
**Ego LB6002**  
\$300

**83**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**QUIET FOR A GAS BLOWER**  
**Stihl BR-200**  
\$280

**83**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Ask Our Experts

**Are battery-powered leaf blowers quieter than gas ones?**



**WORRIED ABOUT NOISE** from your leaf blower harming your hearing—or annoying your neighbors? A battery leaf blower may be a better choice than gas. In our tests of battery backpack blowers, like the Ego, above, we found them to be significantly quieter than their gas counterparts—lower than 65 decibels (dBA) at 50 feet and lower than 85 dBA at your ear—and often without sacrificing power. This means you don't need to wear hearing protection during use (though it can't hurt). All of the gas backpack blowers we test emit at least 85 dBA, enough to warrant hearing protection. But if you prefer gas, the Stihl, above, rates Very Good for noise at 50 feet (good news for your neighbors).

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH



For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to [CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org).

## Laundry Detergents for Sensitive Skin

**WE TESTED:** 9 detergents marketed for sensitive skin  
**WE TEST FOR:** How effectively a detergent pretreats and removes stains from coffee, dirt, grass, blood, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 55  
 Range: 40-75

**BEST OVERALL**  
**Persil ProClean Sensitive Skin**  
 \$0.37 per load

**75**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**BARGAIN BUY**  
**Kirkland Signature (Costco) Ultra Clean Free & Clear**  
 \$0.11 per load

**69**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**INDIVIDUAL PACKS**  
**Seventh Generation Free & Clear Packs Sensitive Skin**  
 \$0.32 per load

**55**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



## Printers

**WE TESTED:** 113 all-in-one models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Print and scan quality, speed, ink use, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

**B&W LASER**  
 Median: 74; Range: 69-78  
**COLOR LASER**  
 Median: 67; Range: 53-69  
**INKJET**  
 Median: 53; Range: 40-69

**BLACK & WHITE LASER FOR A HOME OFFICE**  
**Brother MFC-L5700DW**  
 \$400

**78**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**QUALITY COLOR LASER**  
**HP Color LaserJet Pro MFP M183fw**  
 \$330

**67**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**INKJET TANK PRINTER WITH CHEAP INK REFILLS**  
**Epson EcoTank ET-2720**  
 \$200

**62**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



## Nonstick Cookware Sets

**WE TESTED:** 24 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How quickly water heats in the stockpot, how evenly the frying pans brown pancakes, how well the nonstick coating stands up to steel wool, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 74  
 Range: 53-81

**TOP POTS FOR THE MONEY**  
**Kenmore Arlington Metallic, 12 pieces**  
 \$120

**81**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**DURABLE COATING & DISHWASHER-SAFE**  
**Swiss Diamond Reinforced #6010, 10 pieces**  
 \$600

**78**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**BARGAIN BUY**  
**Red Copper Ceramic Infused Nonstick, 10 pieces**  
 \$80

**74**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



## Slim Refrigerators for Small Kitchens

**WE TESTED:** 36 models with 30-inch or narrower widths  
**WE TEST FOR:** Temp uniformity, thermostat control, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

**TOP-FREEZER**  
 Median: 64; Range: 41-75  
**BOTTOM-FREEZER**  
 Median: 68; Range: 40-79  
**FRENCH-DOOR**  
 Median: 74; Range: 58-81

**BUDGET-FRIENDLY TOP-FREEZER**  
**Blomberg BRFT1522SS, 28"**  
 \$929

**75**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**TALL & SKINNY BOTTOM-FREEZER**  
**Bosch B11CB50SSS, 24"**  
 \$2,599

**70**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



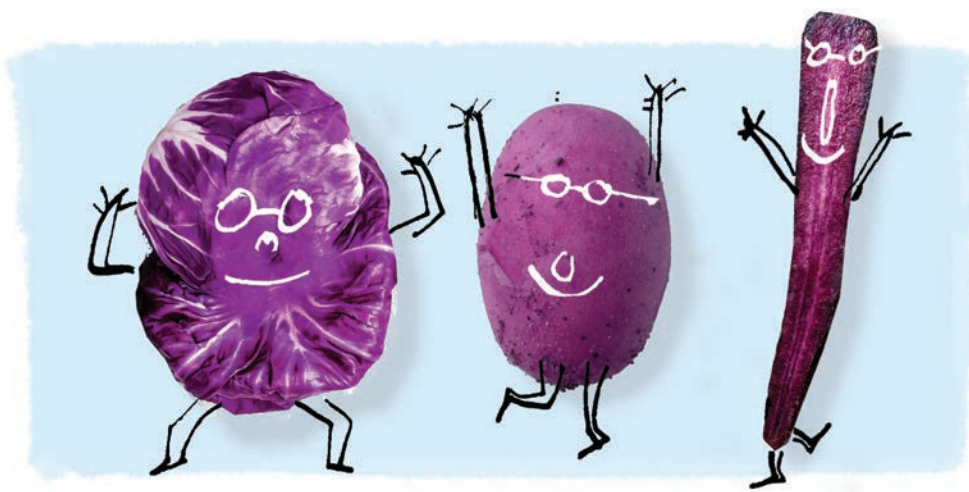
**PETITE FRENCH-DOOR**  
**Haier HRF15N3AGS, 28"**  
 \$1,399

**62**  
 OVERALL  
 SCORE



**Note:** We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.

**COMING NEXT MONTH** Laptops & More



## Are the purple varieties of vegetables—like cauliflower and carrots—better for you than others?

THEY COULD BE. The purple versions of more commonly orange, yellow, and white vegetables are like other purple produce, such as eggplant and blueberries: They contain plant pigments called anthocyanins. These antioxidant compounds may help to prevent chronic illness, including heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes.

Although there's no recommended intake of violet-hued veggies—or anthocyanins, for that matter—eating more of them could be a healthy move, especially given that almost one-third of American adults don't get any anthocyanins in their daily diets. Purple potatoes, for example, have been found to have five times

as much antioxidant activity as white and yellow ones.

So if you come across a purple version of your favorite produce, give it a try. “Different colored vegetables have unique benefits,” says Amy Keating, RD, a nutritionist at Consumer Reports. “That’s one reason nutritionists recommend ‘eating the rainbow’—so you get a wide variety of nutrients.”

### Does it make sense to choose a robotic vacuum when you only have a small amount of floor space to cover?

AS FUN AS IT IS to watch a robotic vacuum do all the work while you put your feet up, it isn't always the most effective cleaning tool, even for a small space. When it comes to performance, CR's tests have found that many affordable robotic vacuums aren't that powerful and don't clean carpets or pet hair very well. Choose a robotic vac as

your primary cleaner only if you live in a single-level apartment with bare floors, no pets, and minimal clutter: The more furniture and other items your robotic vacuum has to navigate—chair legs, loose rug tassels, etc.—the less likely it is to clean everything thoroughly and quickly. And these little gadgets can be pricey: About half the models in our ratings cost \$500 or more.

If you don't have space to store a canister vacuum or an upright model, try a stick vac: “Most sticks will provide a deeper clean than robots,” says CR engineer Alex Nasrallah, who tests vacuums and says it takes only minutes to clean his small apartment with a stick vacuum, vs. 30 minutes or longer with a robotic one. Plus, stick models often cost less than \$500. One very powerful model is the Tineco Pure One S11, which costs \$350 and tops our cordless stick vacuum ratings, earning Excellent scores for cleaning carpets and pet hair. The only downside: Many cordless stick vacs we've tested have unfavorable predicted reliability, with a generally high incidence of problems by the fifth year of ownership, according to a survey of CR members who bought new cordless stick vacuums between 2011 and 2021.

## Are tank printers a better buy than cartridge inkjet printers?

INTRODUCED ABOUT a decade ago, tank (or “reservoir style”) printers typically cost more than traditional cartridge inkjet printers, but they can save you money when it comes to replacing ink. This is because tank printers have big reservoirs that you fill up from bottles that generally run between \$12 and \$30 each, costing only about \$5 per year (about 600 printed pages). That's a big savings over the pricey replacement cartridges needed for an inkjet printer. (They often cost \$25 or more each and don't store much ink, which means your cartridge costs could easily add up to \$80 or more per year.)

Our printer ratings currently feature 18 tank models, mostly from two lines: Canon's MegaTank and Epson's EcoTank. Both earn favorable owner satisfaction scores in CR surveys. <sup>1</sup> (See the recommended Epson EcoTank ET-2720 printer, on page 11, which earns an Excellent rating for printing photos and received a Good score for predicted reliability.) We're not recommending any Canon MegaTank printers because they received only a Fair predicted reliability rating. <sup>2</sup>



We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at [CR.org/askourexperts](https://www.consumerreports.org/askourexperts) ... and watch for the answers.

# CR Insights



✓ **Coop Home Goods Premium Adjustable Loft**  
\$60

**90** OVERALL SCORE

■ 5/5 RESILIENCE

■ 4/5 BREATHABILITY

**CR'S TAKE:** Top of the heap in our testing, this pillow's memory foam and microfiber filling is comfortable and easily adjusted by the handful. Plus, it kept its supportive, fluffy shape even after our tough resilience test.

## IN THE KNOW

### CAN 'ADJUSTABLE' PILLOWS HELP YOU SLEEP BETTER?

DO YOU FIND yourself bunching up your pillow under your head at night? Or trying to spread it out so that your neck isn't at an odd angle? You may want to try an adjustable pillow, which allows you to add or remove the pillow's filling, usually

through a side zipper. (The pillow manufacturer provides extra filling for this purpose.) And you can keep making adjustments until your neck is at the perfect angle for your sleep style, whether you're a back, side, or stomach sleeper. Ideally,

your spine and neck should be at as neutral an angle as possible, says Chris Regan, CR's project leader for pillow testing.

All three pillows shown here received Excellent ratings for both side- and back-sleeper support in our tests for petite, average, and large/tall people. "We tested several configurations for each pillow and found that changing the amount of filling in your pillow can have a big impact on the support it offers," Regan says.

To decide which adjustable pillow is right for you, consider its "resilience" score. That gauges how easily the pillow can be fluffed back into shape after being depressed with weights in humid conditions (to simulate sweaty sleepers). Also look at our "breathability" score: how well a pillow helps dissipate moisture if you tend to sweat while you sleep. The more moisture a pillow is able to dissipate, the cooler you may feel as you sleep.



✓ **Sleep Number ComfortFit Ultimate**  
\$150

**85** OVERALL SCORE

■ 3/5 RESILIENCE

■ 5/5 BREATHABILITY

**CR'S TAKE:** Inside this pillow you'll find three identical layers of memory foam and down alternative fibers; you can remove one or two for less support. Though it's easy to adjust the filling to a good height, some of our testers found the foam to be too hard.



✓ **Avocado Green**  
\$90

**71** OVERALL SCORE

■ 1/5 RESILIENCE

■ 5/5 BREATHABILITY

**CR'S TAKE:** Filled with very firm, dense chunks of certified Global Organic Latex Standard foam pieces and kapok tree fibers, this pillow is easy to adjust. But our lab tests show it may not last long: It wouldn't fluff back into shape after our resilience test.



## FACE-OFF

### WHICH HYBRID SUV TO BUY

IF YOU'RE IN the market for a hybrid SUV, you may be trying to choose between one of these two popular models: the 2021 Honda CR-V and 2021 Toyota RAV4 hybrids. They're both well-rounded, reliable, and—importantly for a hybrid—fuel-efficient. (Both earn CR's Green Choice designation.) In fact, these two vehicles match up so closely in price, performance, dimensions, and available equipment that it can be hard to decide which to buy. Here, our automotive experts compare the two so that you can figure out easily which one might be right for your family.

#### ✓ 2021 Honda CR-V

81

OVERALL SCORE



BASE PRICE RANGE: \$25,350-\$36,350

CR'S MPG: Overall 35 mpg/City 32/Hwy 37

#### ✓ 2021 Toyota RAV4

72

OVERALL SCORE



BASE PRICE RANGE: \$26,250-\$37,330

CR'S MPG: Overall 37 mpg/City 32/Hwy 41

80	ROAD-TEST SCORE	76
↑	PREDICTED RELIABILITY	↓
↓	PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION	↓
8.5 seconds	0-60 MPH ACCELERATION	7.8 seconds
495 miles	DRIVING RANGE	540 miles
3 years or first 36,000 miles	ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	2 years (unlimited miles)

**CR'S TAKE:** The slightly less expensive CR-V hybrid's higher Overall Score is partly due to its roomier rear seat, nicer interior, and above-average predicted reliability rating, according to our survey of CR members who own these vehicles. Overall, the CR-V hybrid is also a bit quieter than the RAV4, and it has more impressive braking performance on both dry and wet surfaces. But the CR-V has a bit shorter driving range and slightly worse fuel economy than the RAV4. Note that the CR-V hybrid is not recommended for towing.

**CR'S TAKE:** Both hybrids are frugal, but the RAV4 delivers slightly better on fuel economy. It also has more user-friendly controls and quicker acceleration than the CR-V. Its average predicted reliability rating is good but not on the same level as the CR-V's. In our braking tests, it was hard to precisely apply pressure to the brake pedal to bring the RAV4 to a smooth stop, and stops were long. If you want to be able to tow a small trailer, the RAV4's 1,750-pound towing capacity is appealing.

PHOTOS: BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: CONSUMER REPORTS; ISTOCK; CONSUMER REPORTS; CONSUMER REPORTS  
PHOTOS, TOP: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

## CR Time Traveler GOING GREEN

**1958** Our tests of washing machines reveal that many use more than 25 gallons of hot water per cycle. We point readers toward models that use less.



**1960** CR measures air pollution in the heavily industrialized Upper Ohio River Valley near Pittsburgh using a densitometer, above, to measure pollutants.



**1970** In April, more than 20 million Americans celebrate "Earth Day" for the first time. The Environmental Protection Agency is founded in December.

**1980** Nearly all of the 400,000 respondents in a CR survey say they took at least one energy-saving action in the past year.

**1986** Forty percent of Americans live where polluting phosphates in laundry detergent is limited or banned. CR's top-rated liquid, Tide, doesn't contain them.



## TECH UPDATE

# NEW REASONS TO GET A DESKTOP

WITH SO MANY laptops lining the shelves of every electronics store, you may have forgotten all about the humble desktop. But there are plenty of reasons to get one for your home now, our tech experts say. A desktop computer offers a large, roomy display, perfect for working at home or streaming a movie, and there's enough computing power to handle the most demanding tasks, such as editing photos. Not to mention its inherently more ergonomic setup: A desktop can eliminate the need to hunch over a laptop, type on a compact keyboard, or fuss with cables when you use an external monitor.

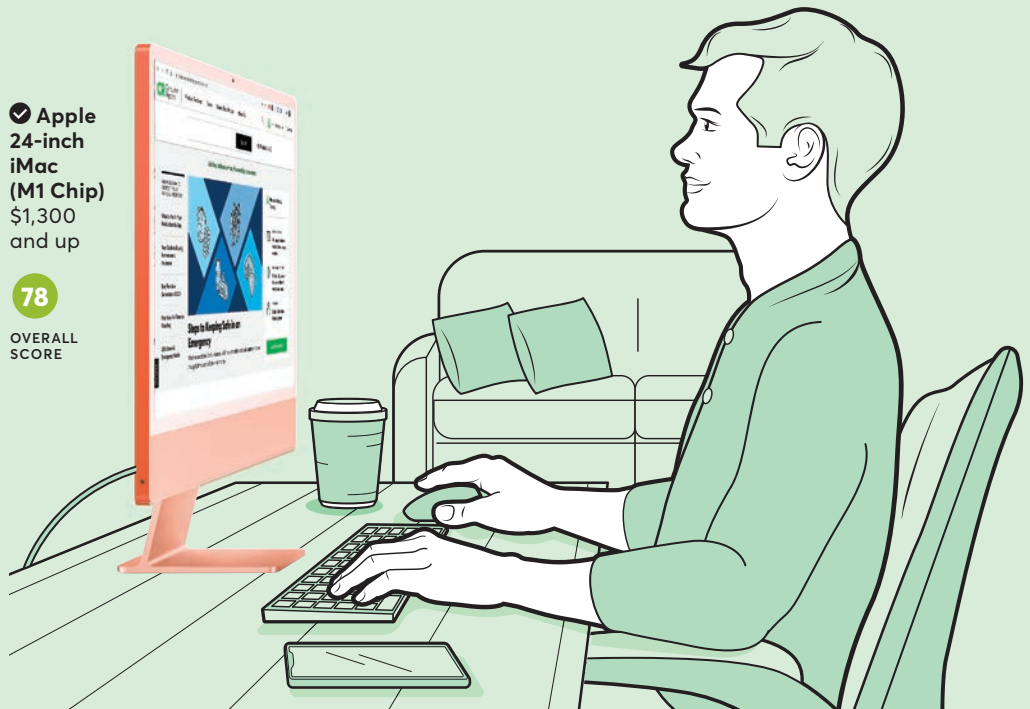
That may be why desktop sales rose 42 percent from January to May 2021 compared with the same period the year before, according to the NPD Group, a market research firm. And there are some great desktops on the market to meet that demand,

including Apple's new 24-inch iMac, enticing consumers with its sleek look and fun color options (seven in all, including hot orange). But is it right for your home office?

Our testers put the new iMac through rigorous lab tests with promising results—though it falls a little short of some all-in-one PC desktops we've tested (such as the HP and Dell models, at right). But if you prefer Apple products,

the new iMac has many virtues, including a "4.5K Retina" high-resolution display that makes Microsoft Word documents and Netflix shows appear razor sharp; a powerful M1 processor; and a built-in 1080p webcam with advanced image processing.

No, you can't bring that desktop to your local coffee shop, but you may find that its power, visual clarity, and ease of use are worth the trade-off.



✓ Apple  
24-inch  
iMac  
(M1 Chip)  
\$1,300  
and up

78  
OVERALL  
SCORE

✓ HP Envy  
32-a0014 \$2,000



82  
OVERALL  
SCORE

💰 Dell Inspiron  
5400-5866SLV \$850



80  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**1993** We test two "green" outlet extensions that promise to reduce energy consumption up to 25 percent a year, but we find they save only \$11 a year.



**2010** "Stop prerinsing dishes before they go in the dishwasher," CR advises. Doing so wastes up to 6,500 gallons of your tap water per year.

**2019** We test WaterSense certified smart sprinkler controllers, which can save the average U.S. home 7,600 gallons of water per year.



💰 LG  
WM3400CW  
\$800

86  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**2021** CR introduces the "Green Choice" for autos and washers. Turn to "Green' Washers That Save You Money," on page 20, to learn more.

**1990** Our panelists test new low-flow showerheads like Teledyne's Water Pik Shower Massage, above.



## COUNTERTOP INTELLIGENCE

### DO MORE WITH YOUR STAND MIXER

SPECIAL ATTACHMENTS PROMISE all sorts of nifty ways to prep food with your stand mixer, including making fresh pasta or spiralizing veggie noodles out of squash (often called “zoodles” when made from zucchini). But with some attachments costing more than \$100, is making noodles with your mixer really worth the investment? CR bought and tested several attachments for two popular stand mixer brands—KitchenAid and Cuisinart—to find out. “Most of the attachments do a good job, but some are easier to use than others,” says Cindy Fisher, who oversees our mixer testing. Here’s how each one performed when we put it to work in our lab.



**75** OVERALL SCORE

#### KitchenAid

KitchenAid has dozens of attachments—more than many other brands—and almost every attachment works with every model of KitchenAid stand mixer (even those that are decades old). For this particular trial, we tested KitchenAid attachments on the KitchenAid Artisan Mini KSM3316XWH, \$350, above.



#### KSM3316XWH 3-Piece Pasta Roller & Cutter Set \$200

This attachment set includes pasta cutters in three sizes. The pasta-making process takes time but is pretty easy once you know what to do: First, pass the pasta dough through the roller several times to flatten it into pasta sheets, adjusting the roller to your desired thickness. Then feed the flat sheets of dough through the pasta cutter section of the attachment. In our lab, it made beautiful strands of fresh spaghetti.



#### KSM1APC 5 Blade Spiralizer \$100

Once you see how easy it is to make zoodles with this attachment, our testers say you may never buy them in a store again. Unlike the Cuisinart spiralizer, there’s no prep required: Just pop a whole zucchini onto the attachment spike and watch as it turns into long, curling zoodles. Then cut the strands into any length you want. At the end, just the core of the vegetable will be left (which you can still cook, too, if you want).



**67** OVERALL SCORE

#### Cuisinart

Nearly all Cuisinart attachments work with any Cuisinart stand mixer (and are often less expensive than KitchenAid ones). For this trial, we tested attachments on the Cuisinart Precision Master SM-50, \$250, above. Attachments are easy to pop on—just remove the decorative plate on the front of the mixer first.



#### PE-50 Pasta Extruder \$130

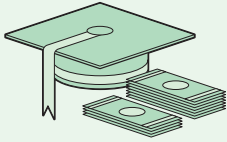
The extruder can make six pasta shapes, including spaghetti and fusilli. Feed small chunks of pasta dough down the tube. After a minute, it will push through the shape plate. Then use the attached cutter to chop noodles to any length. Our testers say it’s easy to use and makes great pasta—but cleanup is tricky. We had to use a skewer to push dried pasta bits out of it. Cuisinart also makes a Pasta Roller and Cutter attachment, much like the KitchenAid roller at far left, but we have not tested it.



#### PrepExpress Spiralizer/Slicer \$50

This spiralizer requires a little more prep time than the KitchenAid version, at far left, because you have to cut the vegetables into pieces small enough to fit into the feeder tube—which also means shorter zoodles. Still, we liked the thin strands of squash it cut. Plus, this attachment does double duty: You can also use it as a slicer. We got perfectly thin slices of cucumbers and potatoes with it—just right for homemade chips.





#### CR MONEY SAVER

## RESUMING STUDENT LOAN PAYMENTS

At the start of the pandemic, the Department of Education suspended payments on federal student loans with no penalty and zero interest. Debt collection against borrowers in default was also halted. But that pause is scheduled to end on **Sept. 30, 2021**.<sup>\*</sup> When required payments resume, you'll get a notice from your loan servicer, but you should also:

1. Double-check your account to ensure any automatic payments you had previously set up are still in place (many lenders give a break on interest if you auto pay).
2. If you're in a loan forgiveness program, such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness, which requires 120 on-time payments, check with your loan servicer to make sure it's counting the months when payments were paused. Each paused month counts as an on-time payment.
3. If paying will be a struggle now, apply to be in an "income-driven" repayment program that will limit your payment to a percentage of what you earn.
4. If the Department of Education extends student loan waivers again, consider making payments anyway (if you can afford it). There's zero interest on paused loans, so your payments will go straight to the principal, meaning you can pay down the loan faster.

<sup>\*</sup>Check [studentaid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) to see whether the waivers are extended again.

#### CR SMART SOLUTION

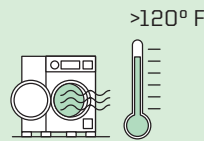
## GOT MOTHS? HERE'S HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CLOTHES



EVER PULL ON a cashmere sweater only to discover it has a new hole in it? That's a tell-tale sign that you have a moth problem. You may also notice small white caterpillars (known as larvae), tiny eggs, or excrement on your clothes, or moths fluttering around the closet. No matter which sign you see, you need to act quickly to stop an infestation. "A single female moth will lay an average of 50 eggs, and then those babies will be having babies within months," says Jennifer Brumfield, an entomologist at pest control company Western Pest Services.

First, brush off any eggs, larvae, and excrement you see into a sealed plastic zipper bag to prevent them from reemerging, and trash it. Then try one of the methods below to eliminate any remaining pests.

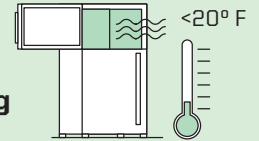
### The Heating Method



The hottest setting on your dryer (it should be over 120° F) can kill eggs or larvae on most items—but don't try this on delicate items (which should be taken to the dry cleaner, where the heat and solvents can kill eggs and larvae, too).

**What to do:** Just place your non-delicate clothing (everyday pants and shirts, for example) directly into the dryer on the hottest setting for at least 30 minutes. Don't wet or wash the items first.

### The Freezing Method



Cold temperatures in your freezer can kill moth eggs and larvae. This method is especially useful for items that can't be dry-cleaned or thrown in the dryer, such as belts and purses.

**What to do:** Seal items in airtight bags and place them in your freezer at a temperature lower than 20° F for a week (or 72 hours if your freezer is colder than minus 20° F). Let the items defrost fully before unbagging them, because fabric fibers become brittle when frozen and can break.

#### METHODS TO SKIP

**Natural moth repellents**, including cedar, lavender, cloves, vinegar, and black pepper, don't repel moths, says entomologist Brumfield. Plus, cedar oil can damage wool sweaters and fine fabrics.

**Pheromone traps** are popular sticky glue moth catchers. But they attract only male moths, so they won't stop the female moths from continuing to lay eggs in your closet.

**Mothballs** do work, but only because they're highly toxic. They can harm all living creatures, including you, your children, and your pets. Plus, your clothes end up smelling like mothballs.

## FOOD IQ™

### CHOOSE A HEALTHIER SNACK BAR

BREAKFAST, post-workout snack, afternoon pick-me-up—when you need something quick and portable, a snack bar is an easy solution. But before you grab just any bar to fuel up, take a closer look at the label: It could be a sugar bomb. To help you choose wisely, CR nutritionist Amy Keating, RD, shares two things to look for on that snack bar wrapper.

#### Which ingredients come first?

The ingredients list can tell you a lot about a bar's nutritional content. Choose a bar that contains mostly “real” foods, such as fruits, nuts, oats, or eggs. It's even better when those ingredients are near the top of the list—for example, the RXBar, at right, lists dates first. And look for a bar with about 3 to 5 grams of protein and fiber. Bars that have much more than that tend to have highly processed ingredients, such as chicory root fiber or soy protein isolate.

#### Are there a lot of added sugars?

Ideally, you want a bar with zero added sugars (those sugars, such as syrups, that are added during processing), but up to 6 grams is reasonable. Some snack bars contain as much as a typical candy bar. For instance, a Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar has 21 grams of added sugars, the same amount as the Clif Bar below.

Here's how three snack bars compare.



LESS PROCESSED ←

→ MORE PROCESSED

#### RXBar Chocolate Sea Salt

\$2.20 for a 1.83-oz. bar

Calories.....210  
Saturated fat..... 2 grams  
Added sugars..... 0 grams  
Fiber..... 5 grams  
Protein..... 12 grams  
Sodium..... 260 mg

**CR'S TAKE:** This RXBar is mostly made with “real” whole foods—the only processed ingredient is “natural flavors.” There's plenty of protein from natural sources: egg whites and nuts.

#### Kind Dark Chocolate Nuts & Sea Salt

\$1.20 for a 1.4-oz. bar

Calories.....170  
Saturated fat..... 3 g  
Added sugars..... 4 g  
Fiber..... 7 g  
Protein..... 5 g  
Sodium..... 140 mg

**CR'S TAKE:** The Kind bar is pretty good fuel but loses points because it has chicory root fiber and palm kernel oil, which is high in saturated fat. Still, nuts and a low amount of added sugars redeem it.

#### Clif Bar Sweet N Salty Chocolate Chunk with Sea Salt

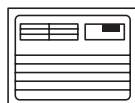
\$1.45 for a 2.4-oz. bar

Calories.....250  
Saturated fat..... 1.5 g  
Added sugars..... 21 g  
Fiber..... 4 g  
Protein..... 9 g  
Sodium..... 300 mg

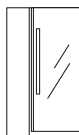
**CR'S TAKE:** Brown rice syrup, a type of added sugar, is the very first ingredient. Though it has rolled oats and soybeans, the Clif Bar also has oat fiber and soy protein isolate, which are processed.

SEPTEMBER  
IS THE  
BEST TIME  
TO BUY ...

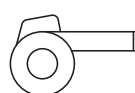
#### AIR CONDITIONERS



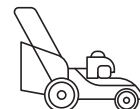
#### FREEZERS



#### LEAF BLOWERS



#### LAWN MOWERS





## RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT [CR.ORG/MORE](https://www.consumerreports.org/cr.org/more).



### KIDDE SMOKE ALARMS

Kidde is recalling about 226,000 TruSense smoke alarms and combination smoke/carbon monoxide alarms because the alarm can fail to alert owners to a fire. The alarms were sold at Walmart, Home Depot, Menards, and other department, home, and hardware stores; electrical distributors nationwide; and online at Amazon, shopkidde.com, and other online retailers from May 2019 through September 2020 for \$10 to \$70.

**What to do:** Contact Kidde at 844-796-9972 or go to [kidde.com](https://www.kidde.com) for details and to get a free replacement alarm. The company instructs owners to keep using the recalled alarm until you install a replacement.

### KLEIN TOOLS VOLTAGE TESTERS

Klein Tools is recalling about 1,690,000 Model NCVT-1 non-contact voltage testers (which automatically detect and indicate voltage in outlets, circuit breakers, lighting fixtures, and more) because the on/off button can remain depressed during the power on or power off cycle, causing the tester to work improperly. If you're testing electrical sources, you may not be warned of the

presence of live voltage if the tool is not properly operating, posing a shock hazard. The tester tools were sold at Home Depot stores and industrial distributors, electrical wholesalers, and some hardware stores nationwide from January 2020 through March 2021 for about \$17 when sold separately and about \$40 to \$68 when sold in a kit.

**What to do:** Stop using the voltage tester and contact Klein Tools at 800-527-3099 or go to [kleintools.com](https://www.kleintools.com) for details and instructions to get a free replacement tool.

### IKEA DISHWARE

Ikea is recalling about 148,000 bowls, plates, and mugs because they can become brittle and break, causing hot food or liquid to leak out and posing a burn hazard. The dishware was sold at Ikea's stores and website from August 2019 through May 2021 for \$4 to \$12.

**What to do:** Stop using the dishware and return it to any Ikea store for a full refund. Call Ikea at 888-966-4532 or go to [ikea-usa.com](https://www.ikea-usa.com) for details.

### FISHER-PRICE SOOTHERS & GLIDERS

Fisher-Price is recalling about 120,000 4-in-1 Rock 'n Glide Soothers and 55,000 2-in-1 Soothe 'n Play Gliders following reports of four infant deaths in the 4-in-1 Rock 'n Glide Soother. The Consumer Product Safety Commission cautions that inclined products, such as gliders, soothers, rockers, and swings, are not safe for infant sleep, due to the risk of suffocation. The products were sold at juvenile product stores and mass merchandisers and online, including Walmart and Target stores and Amazon. The 4-in-1 Rock 'n Glide Soothers were sold from January 2014 through December 2020 for about \$108. The 2-in-1 Soothe 'n Play Gliders were sold from November 2018 through May 2021 for about \$125.

**What to do:** Immediately stop using the product. Contact Fisher-Price at 855-853-6224 for details and a refund, or go to [service.mattel.com](https://service.mattel.com) and click on "Recall & Safety Alerts." Also go to [CR.org/sleepers0921](https://www.consumerreports.org/cr.org/sleepers0921) to learn about CR's ongoing investigation into hazardous infant sleeper products.

### GRAMR TEA KETTLES

Gramr is recalling about 92,135 brushed gold tea kettles because the kettles can expel hot water and/or excessive steam during use, posing a burn hazard. The kettles were sold online at [causebox.com](https://www.causebox.com) in 2021 "Winter Box" seasonal assortments from November 2020 through April 2021 for \$50 to \$55. The kettle was also sold separately online at [roseandfitzgerald.com](https://www.roseandfitzgerald.com) from December 2020 through February 2021 for about \$100.

**What to do:** Stop using the kettle and contact Gramr at 866-512-2152 or go to [causebox.com](https://www.causebox.com) for details and a credit or refund.

### TARGET SHOWER STOOLS

Target is recalling about 58,500 Room Essentials shower stools because the stool can become unstable or slippery while in use, causing it to tip over and posing a fall hazard. The stools were sold at Target stores and online from March 2019 through September 2020 for about \$35.

**What to do:** Stop using the stool. Return it to any Target store or call Target at 800-440-0680 or go to [target.com](https://www.target.com) for a refund.

### CAMELBAK WATER BOTTLES

CamelBak is recalling about 46,000 Podium and Peak Fitness water bottles because a small silicone valve in caps sold with the bottle can come loose and detach, posing a choking hazard. The bottles were sold at sporting goods stores and online at [camelbak.com](https://www.camelbak.com) from February 2019 through January 2021 for \$10 to \$25.

**What to do:** Stop using the cap sold with the water bottle and contact CamelBak at 800-767-8725 or go to [camelbak.com](https://www.camelbak.com) for details and to get a free replacement cap.

### COVE APPLIANCE DISHWASHERS

Cove Appliance is recalling about 42,000 24-inch built-in dishwashers because the heating element can fail to properly shut off and can overheat, posing a fire hazard. The dishwashers were sold at home appliance stores from February 2018 through May 2021 for \$2,400 to \$2,500.

**What to do:** Stop using the dishwasher, unplug it, and call Cove Appliance at 888-651-9376 or go to [coveappliance.com](https://www.coveappliance.com) for details and to schedule a free repair.



# PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST  
RATINGS FROM  
OUR LABS

## 'Green' Washers That Save You Money

The best models in our tests deliver super-clean laundry—and lower water and electric bills, too.

by Keith Flamer



### HOW ECO-FRIENDLY FRONT-LOADING WASHERS WORK

- 1** First, the machine tumbles the dry load a bit to sense its size. Then the tub fills to a preset level, and the washer adds water as needed to maintain that level.
- 2** Our testing shows that most loads require only about a quarter-cup of detergent.
- 3** During the wash cycle, a motor spins the drum clockwise, then counterclockwise. This action is gentler on clothes than the agitation of a top-loader.
- 4** High spin-cycle speeds (1,000 to 1,400 rpms) remove rinse water from the clean laundry, cutting down on dryer time and the energy it requires.

**I**F YOU'RE IN the market for a new washing machine, you'll certainly want a model that does a great job getting your clothes clean at a price that fits your budget. It's also a smart idea to look for one that will save on water and energy costs. The models in our ratings on page 25 do it all, combining top-notch washing performance with efficient operation across all price ranges. All of them have Consumer Reports' new Green Choice designation—marked in our ratings with a green leaf icon—which helps you easily identify the most eco-friendly options as you shop.

### The Best Cost Savers

The least efficient washing machines can use up to 45 gallons of water per load. The typical household launders about 300 loads a year according to Energy Star, the government program that helps consumers identify energy-efficient products. That's nearly enough water to fill a 12x24-foot swimming pool to an average depth of 6 feet.

And over a 30-year period, using more energy- and water-efficient washers could save consumers up to \$30 billion, according to the Appliance Standards Awareness Project, citing information from the Department of Energy. So there are good reasons to consider the environmental impact of washing a load of laundry, not the least of which is how it will affect your water and energy bills.

As you consider the washers in our ratings, you'll see that the top-performing models have CR's "recommended" mark. Or if they combine top-notch performance and a relatively low price, they carry the CR Best Buy symbol. Now you can also find the most eco-friendly choices by looking for the leaf symbol that indicates the model is a Green Choice.



### HOW A WASHER EARNS CR'S GREEN CHOICE DESIGNATION

To become a Green Choice, a washer must earn top scores in four key areas. See all of these models in our ratings featured on page 25.

#### WATER EFFICIENCY

We measure a washer's total water consumption—hot and cold—per pound of laundry. The most water-efficient washers in our ratings average about 10 gallons, 75 percent less than older models.

#### ENERGY EFFICIENCY

We calculate how much electricity it takes to run a washer, heat its water, and dry clothes post-wash. Models that extract more water from clothes allow a dryer to use less energy during the tumble-dry cycle, which earns the washer a higher score.

#### BRAND RELIABILITY

This rating, based on data from our latest member surveys in which 111,491 CR members shared their experiences with 127,353 washers, estimates the likelihood that a brand and type of washer will break or experience problems within the first five years of ownership. Reliable washing machines are less likely to require repairs.

#### GENTLENESS

We measure how rough a machine is on washed fabric. Gentle washers are easy on clothes, extending their life span and helping to reduce global clothing consumption and carbon emissions.

The designation "focuses solely on the factors that impact the environment," says Jim Nanni, a CR associate director and appliance testing team leader. These aspects are water efficiency, energy efficiency, reliability, and how gentle the machine is on fabric.

Almost half of Americans (47 percent) say they would be willing to pay more money for products that are green, eco-friendly, or safe for the environment, according to an April 2021 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,288 adults in the U.S.

But in this case you don't have to. Our current Green Choice washing machines start at \$800, far less than some of the highest-priced models in our overall washing machine ratings.

And you won't be sacrificing clean clothes, either. "Our tests show that Green Choice washers not only reduce one's environmental footprint, they also tend to be excellent at cleaning clothes," says James Dickerson, PhD, CR's chief scientific officer. "That's one of the big reasons why a majority of the Green Choice washers are also recommended by CR."

CR first launched Green Choice for automobiles in February, assigning a green leaf logo to new cars, SUVs, and minivans with the lowest greenhouse gas and smog-forming emissions.

"Every consumer should be able to buy products that help save money and reduce their environmental footprint," says David Friedman, CR's vice president of advocacy. "If we're going to do something about the huge cost that climate change and air pollution create for consumers, it can't just be the consumer's responsibility. Everyone needs to share in it. And that's exactly what Green Choice is about—better information for consumers and an opportunity to encourage manufacturers to do better with their next products."



## 10 Ways to Cut Your Laundry Costs

**DOING LAUNDRY ISN'T CHEAP.** In electricity alone, Americans used 11 billion kilowatt-hours washing laundry in cold water last year and 63 billion kilowatt-hours drying it. That's about \$1,463,000,000 and \$8,379,000,000, respectively. "Around 5 to 10 percent of a home's total electricity use goes to washing and drying clothes," says Noah Horowitz, senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council. And that's not counting water use—or the energy we each spend on the job.

Green Choice washing machines can save you money, and they're better

for the environment. The green leaf icon (see page 25) distinguishes the most eco-friendly models from the rest in CR's ratings.

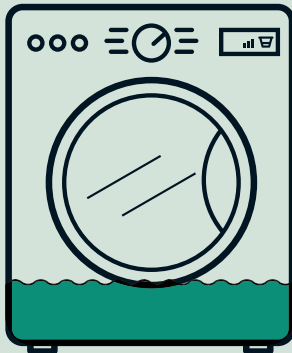
These models typically have faster spin cycles, which extract more water from clothes, cutting down on costly dryer time. And the most efficient dryers have advanced moisture sensors that cut their energy use by about 20 percent compared with dryers that use thermostat heating elements. About half of the electric dryers in our ratings are Energy Star certified. (Go to [CR.org/dryers](https://www.consumerreports.org/dryers) if you're in the market for a replacement.)

## Some Washers Save Money, Others Waste It

There's a big difference in the water use of the most and least efficient washers in our tests

### MOST EFFICIENT FRONT-LOADER

✓  **LG WM3900HWA** \$1,090 **86** OVERALL SCORE  
 WASHING PERFORMANCE




**8**  
GALLONS

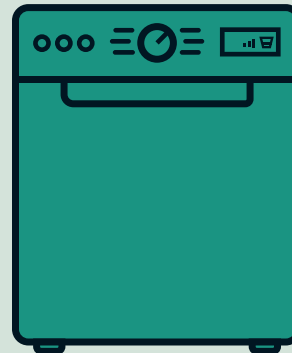
AVERAGE USAGE PER TYPE

FRONT-LOADERS  
**10 GALLONS**

HIGH-EFFICIENCY (HE) TOP-LOADERS  
**13 GALLONS**

### LEAST EFFICIENT AGITATOR TOP-LOADER

**Kenmore 20232** \$450 **39** OVERALL SCORE  
 WASHING PERFORMANCE



**45**  
GALLONS

AGITATOR TOP-LOADERS  
**20 GALLONS**



Here are more tips from CR's experts and Energy Star. They won't affect cleaning performance, but they'll help save energy and water.

## IN THE WASHING MACHINE

### 1 WASH FULL LOADS



It might seem like a no-brainer, but let's start here: Wait to run a full load rather than washing several smaller loads. One large load using 13 gallons of water is more efficient than two small loads using 10 gallons of water each.

### 2 DON'T USE TOO MUCH DETERGENT



You only need a quarter-cup of detergent for an average load, according to our lab tests. Overdosing on detergent is a bad move for your budget and the environment, because it means extra detergent is being dispersed into local water systems. It can also lead to unwanted buildup and odors in your machine.

### 3 OPT FOR COLD WATER WHEN YOU CAN

Our tests reveal that today's enzyme-based laundry detergents remove dirt and stains effectively without the aid of hot water. Brighten whites with cold water and a bleach alternative, such as OxiClean. But you'll need hot water for tackling oily stains, cleaning dirty diapers, and washing sheets and towels of someone who has been sick. Regardless of your washer type, setting your water heater to 120° F rather than 140° F saves energy when doing laundry with warm or hot water.

### 4 CHOOSE THE HIGHEST SPIN SPEED BASED ON THE LOAD



This extracts more water from your laundry, cutting dryer time. If you've tried this and found that clothes come out wrinkled after drying, remove the laundry from the washer, untangle, and shake out before you toss into the dryer. But be cautious with delicate items, which don't retain as much moisture and may become damaged while spinning at higher speeds.

### 5 AVOID THE SANITARY CYCLE EXCEPT WHEN TRULY NECESSARY

Available on certain models, this relies on an internal heater to boost the water's temperature, and it increases energy use significantly. It can be useful when washing the clothes and linens of someone who's sick or recovering from COVID-19.

## IN THE DRYER

### 6 CLEAN THE LINT SCREEN AND DRYER DUCT



Cleaning the lint screen before every load will improve air circulation and prevent fires. And if you use dryer sheets, know that they can leave a film on the filter that reduces airflow. So once a month, scrub the lint screen gently with a brush and warm soapy water.

Rinse it well and allow to dry fully before reinserting. Also, at least once a year use a brush or your vacuum to keep the duct clean and promote airflow.

### 7 DRY SIMILAR ITEMS TOGETHER

Don't mix heavy and lightweight fabrics. Dry (and wash) towels with towels and sheets with sheets.

### 8 CLEAN THE MOISTURE SENSORS



The residue that dryer sheets can leave on sensors can build up and trick the machine into thinking laundry is dry even when it's still damp. Check your owner's manual for how to clean your model's sensors.

### 9 USE THE AUTOMATIC CYCLE INSTEAD OF TIMED DRYING

For most dryers, the auto cycle relies on one or more moisture sensors to determine when laundry is dry to avoid overdrying. Otherwise, if running a load for, say, 45 minutes, the machine might waste energy continuing to heat already dried clothes for several more minutes.

### 10 TRY AIR- OR LINE-DRYING



Shake items before hanging them to lessen wrinkles, and turn bright or dark items inside out to reduce fading. Always lay sweaters and stretchy knits flat to dry to avoid stretching them or puckering the shoulders.



## What About Top-Loaders?

Currently, only front-loaders earn our Green Choice designation. But here's a look at the most water- and energy-efficient machines across all 3 types.

### FRONT-LOADERS

This type generally cleans better, uses less water, and is gentler on fabric than top-loaders. Cycle times are longer, but they spin faster after the rinse cycle—saving drying time. One downside: Front-loaders can be prone to odors and mold.



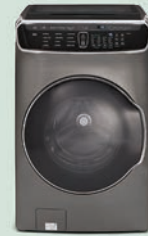
**LG WM4000HWA**  
\$850

**86** OVERALL  
SCORE



**LG SIGNATURE  
WM9500HKA**  
\$2,000

**85** OVERALL  
SCORE



**SAMSUNG  
FLEXWASH  
WV60M9900AV** \$1,400

**80** OVERALL  
SCORE

### HIGH-EFFICIENCY (HE) TOP-LOADERS

These washers, which don't have a central agitator, boast large capacities. They use less water than agitators and extract more of it during the spin cycle.



**LG WT7100CW**  
\$800

**81** OVERALL  
SCORE



**SAMSUNG  
WA50R5400AW** \$800

**67** OVERALL  
SCORE



**SAMSUNG  
WA50T5300AC** \$855

**66** OVERALL  
SCORE

### AGITATOR TOP-LOADERS

Conventional top-loaders with agitators carry a lower purchase price than other types but use more water, so costs over time are higher. They're also rougher on fabrics than the options above.



**LG WT7305CW**  
\$900

**73** OVERALL  
SCORE



**SAMSUNG  
WA44A3405AW** \$750


**66** OVERALL  
SCORE



**GE  
GTW465ASNWW** \$660

**63** OVERALL  
SCORE










**Ratings** ➤ **Green Giants** These front-loading washing machines have earned CR's new Green Choice designation, indicated by the leaf icon (below). That distinguishes them as the most eco-friendly models in our tests.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results					Features				
				Predicted reliability	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Cycle time (min.)	Stackable	Dimensions (in.)
				Owner satisfaction										

#### FRONT-LOADERS

✓ LG WM9000HVA	 86	\$1,800	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5.2	105		41 x 29 x 35
💰 LG WM4000HWA	 86	\$850	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	4.5	85	●	39 x 27 x 31
✓ LG WM3900HWA	 86	\$1,090	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	4.5	85	●	39 x 27 x 31
✓ LG WM3600HWA	 86	\$900	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	4.5	105	●	39 x 27 x 31
💰 LG WM3400CW	 86	\$800	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	4.5	105	●	39 x 27 x 31
✓ LG Signature WM9500HKA	 85	\$2,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5.8	120		41 x 30 x 34
✓ LG WM3997HWA	 84	\$2,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	4.3	100	●	39 x 27 x 32
✓ LG WM8100HVA	 82	\$1,100	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5.2	95	●	41 x 29 x 32
✓ Kenmore Elite 41982	 81	\$1,100	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5.2	105	●	41 x 29 x 35
✓ LG WM4200HWA	 81	\$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	5.0	105	●	39 x 27 x 33
✓ LG WM4500HBA	 81	\$1,250	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	5.0	105	●	39 x 27 x 33
✓ Electrolux EFLS627UTT	 81	\$1,080	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	4.4	85	●	39 x 27 x 32
✓ Samsung FlexWash WV60M9900AV	 80	\$1,400	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5.0	100		47 x 27 x 34
✓ Electrolux EFLS527UIW	 80	\$900	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	4.3	85	●	39 x 27 x 32

#### COMPACT

✓ Miele WWH660WCS	 83	\$1,800	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.3	105	●	34 x 24 x 25
✓ Miele WWH860WCS	 83	\$2,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.3	105	●	34 x 24 x 25
✓ Samsung WW22N6850QX	 83	\$1,300	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.2	60	●	34 x 24 x 27
✓ Miele WWF060WCS	 83	\$1,500	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.3	105	●	34 x 24 x 25
💰 Samsung WW22K6800AW	 79	\$800	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.2	100	●	34 x 24 x 27
✓ Bosch 800 Series WAT28402UC	 76	\$1,450	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.2	60	●	34 x 24 x 26
✓ Bosch 500 Series WAT28401UC	 76	\$1,255	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.2	60	●	34 x 24 x 26
✓ Bosch 300 Series WAT28400UC	 76	\$1,100	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2.2	60	●	34 x 24 x 26
LG WM1388HW	 65	\$1,000	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	2.3	75	●	34 x 24 x 27

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/washers](https://www.consumerreports.org/washers).

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand, not under a service contract, will develop problems or break within the first five years. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members who

are extremely likely to recommend the washer they bought. Independent of the Overall Score, CR's Green Choice leaf icon distinguishes the most eco-friendly washers from the rest in our ratings based on water efficiency, energy efficiency, reliability, and gentleness on fabric. **Washing performance** reflects the degree of color change in stained fabric swatches added to a load of mixed

cottons, using the washer's normal cycle on the heaviest soil setting. **Energy efficiency** indicates the energy needed to heat the water, run the washer, and remove the water left in the clothes after the spin cycle completes. Machines that require less water earn higher scores for **Water efficiency**. For our **Gentleness** test, we count frayed threads on fabric swatches after washing and air-drying.

Our score for **Noise** reflects panelists' judgments during the fill, wash, drain, and spin phases. The vibrations a washer transmits to a suspended wood floor are captured in the **Vibration** score. **Claimed capacity** is what the manufacturer states. **Cycle time** is for the normal cycle on the heaviest soil setting, rounded to the nearest 5 minutes. **Price** is approximate retail.



# Upgrade Your Kitchen— for Less

by Dan DiClerico Illustrations by Sam Kalda

**D**URING THE YEAR-PLUS of pandemic living, you probably spent more time in your kitchen than ever, and perhaps you're itching to make a change. Maybe it's the tired color scheme. Or the cluttered countertops and drawers. Or the way the oven temperature always seems to be a few degrees off.

But how do you decide what really needs to be replaced and what just needs a good refresh? And with costs for everything from lumber to appliances in flux, what's the best way to upgrade at a price you can afford?

According to Remodeling's 2021 Cost vs Value report, a full-scale gut renovation for a 200-square-foot kitchen (with middle-of-the-road materials) costs

around \$75,000, up almost 10 percent from 2020, probably thanks to COVID-induced labor shortages and (potentially temporary) price hikes for many building materials. But you don't have to spend anywhere near that much to get a kitchen you love, say the remodeling pros and interior designers we spoke to, as well as CR's own home experts. The trick is to focus your remodeling dollars where they're needed most.

Here's how to figure out whether you should go for an update or a replacement for key areas in your kitchen, and smart strategies for achieving the changes you want on your budget. You'll see price estimates throughout, but know that numbers will vary, based on the materials you use, the size of your space, and the cost of labor, if you hire a pro.

*A bold new paint color for your cabinets or walls is a simple DIY update for \$300 or less.*



*New hardware with a more modern style can update the look of your cabinets for between \$2 and \$10 per piece.*

## Cabinets

**ANY CHANGES YOU MAKE** to your cabinets can have a big impact on the style and function of your kitchen because they take up so much real estate. If your cabinets are in good shape—the boxes are solid, the doors are intact, and the drawers glide smoothly—refinishing the exterior will transform their look. If your cabinets have been falling apart, or you want a totally new door style or layout, consider replacing them. This is by far the more expensive option, but there are some smart ways to save.

## FIXING UP WHAT YOU HAVE?

**What's involved:** Changing the color of your cabinets with paint is DIY-friendly but time-consuming because you'll need to remove the doors and drawers, sand the surfaces, and apply two coats of paint. "Go for a semi-gloss finish paint," says Rico de Paz, who runs the CR paint test lab. "The high shine makes the cabinets look new and gives them a stain-resistant, wipeable finish."

You can also have existing cabinets "refaced" by a pro, who'll replace old doors and drawers with new ones and cover the fronts and sides of the cabinet boxes with a matching finish, such as wood veneer or laminate.

New door and drawer hardware are super-easy style upgrades. Just be sure new handles are the same size as the originals so that you won't have to drill new screw holes (and fill in old ones).

**Costs:** According to HomeAdvisor, an online home services company, \$100 to \$300 for materials to paint a 150-square-foot space; \$4 to \$10 per square foot to hire a pro to refinish cabinets; around \$91 to \$454 per linear foot to reface cabinets; and \$2 to \$50 per piece for new hardware.

## WANT SOMETHING NEW?

**What's involved:** Buying stock or semi-custom cabinets is far less expensive than having custom units built. A contractor or cabinet installer will measure your space, order the cabinets from a kitchen showroom or home center, then handle the installation; home centers and Ikea also offer design and installation services.

Or try a budget-savvy designer trick: Buy just the cabinet boxes from Ikea and add semi-custom doors, drawers, trim, or hardware. One company that provides this service is Semihandmade.

**Other ways to save:** Removing the old cabinets yourself could save you around \$500 on demolition. If they're in decent shape, you could also donate them to an organization such as Habitat

for Humanity's ReStore, or give them away on a site like Freecycle. When choosing new cabinets, stick with a streamlined design instead of an ornate one; these typically cost less. They're also easier to clean. "We've been specifying more Shaker-style cabinets for this reason," says Ariana Lovato, a kitchen designer with the National Kitchen & Bath Association who is based on the central coast of California.

Also, consider buying secondhand cabinets from a local salvage shop, Habitat for Humanity's ReStore, or Renovation Angel, which salvages entire

luxury kitchens, then sells and ships them around the country. Purchased this way, custom cabinets that originally cost \$50,000 might be available for under \$5,000. Even with the cost of shipping and installation, you could save up to 90 percent, depending on the style and condition of the cabinets.

**Costs:** According to HomeAdvisor, \$150 to \$200 per linear foot for stock cabinets or \$75 to \$400 for semi-custom. Installation costs one to three times the price of materials; Semihandmade estimates \$2,450 to \$4,475 above the cost of Ikea boxes.

### Instant Updates



**HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Showcase Blue Endeavour HGSW1451**  
\$37 per gallon

**87** OVERALL SCORE



**Ayesha Curry Covered Dutch Oven**  
\$70

**76** OVERALL SCORE



**KitchenAid Artisan KSM150PS**  
\$430

**79** OVERALL SCORE

*Need extra storage? Install open shelving for around \$100.*

*Get the rich look of hardwood for less with a floating luxury vinyl or porcelain floor.*







Statement light fixtures can add attitude (and illumination) for around \$50 and up.

## Squeeze More Storage Out of Your Space

Kitchen pros love these three clutter-busting solutions

### ROLLING KITCHEN CART

A built-in island can cost thousands; a cart can provide similar storage for a few hundred dollars. "Some have fold-down tabletops and hideaway stools," says Caroline Harmon, Lowe's trend strategy manager.

### CABINET ORGANIZERS

These retrofit solutions "help make use of every square inch of your cabinets," says Amy Tokos, an organizer based in Omaha, Neb., and president of the National Association of Productivity & Organizing Professionals. Her favorites include lazy Susans for blind corner cabinets, rollout drawers for base cabinets, and tiered shelf stands for pantries.

### TOE-KICK DRAWER

These push-to-open drawers make use of the space at the bottom of base cabinets. "[It's] a hidden but useful place to store school supplies," says Bailey Carson, home expert at Angi. They can cost \$250 and up, depending on whether you need professional installation.

## Lighting

**CHANGING THE BULBS** and adding a dimmer can make a surprising difference. If you want to replace or add a fixture, you may need an electrician's help.

### FIXING UP WHAT YOU HAVE?

**What's involved:** For starters, make the switch to Energy Star certified LEDs. Even though an LED bulb may cost more up front, you could save \$55 dollars on electricity over its life, compared with

a standard incandescent. And consider adding a dimmer switch, which "lets you adjust the intensity of light based on your needs," says Joe Rey-Barreau, a lighting designer in Lexington, Ky.

**Costs:** \$1 to \$3 per LED bulb and \$10 and up for dimmer switches at Home Depot (plus about \$100 to \$200 for installation, according to HomeAdvisor).

### WANT SOMETHING NEW?

**What's involved:** Plug-in undercabinet light fixtures are an easy way to cast task lighting on your counters. Good choices are linear and strip lights,

which brighten the surface evenly.

Adding a decorative fixture can make a bold visual impact. If you choose a style with glass shades, go for opaque or patterned glass, says Laurie Gross, president of Gross Electric, a lighting showroom and electrical distributor in Ohio and Michigan. "They prevent glare and hide grime better."

**Costs:** About \$50 to \$100 for undercabinet lighting; \$50 and up for pendants at Home Depot (they can cost less at salvage or vintage stores). Installation costs \$95 to \$250, per HomeAdvisor.



New laminate patterns can offer the look of stone for significantly less than the price of the real thing.

## Countertops

**YOU MAY BE ABLE** to improve the look of worn counters—whether they’re made of wood, laminate, granite, marble, or quartz. Anything beyond minor flaws, though, probably means replacing.

### FIXING UP WHAT YOU HAVE?

**What’s involved:** Got laminate? Try using a touch-up kit to fill in minor scratches or dings. If the entire surface looks less than picture-perfect, you could refinish it with a product formulated for countertops, such as Rust-Oleum’s Countertop Coating.\* Stone countertops will need professional refinishing: buffing scratches, sanding away stains, and polishing the surface.

To update the backsplash, you could try peel-and-stick tiles (see the facing page) or, if the surface is flat, removable wallpaper. “If you’re a renter or undecided, there are really great peel-and-stick wall coverings,” says Cindy Aplanalp, an interior designer based in Houston.

**Costs:** For a DIY touch-up kit for laminate countertops, \$50 at Amazon or Home Depot. Rust-Oleum Countertop Coating costs \$22 per 29 fluid ounces at Lowe’s. Peel-and-stick tile costs \$3 to \$14 per square foot at Home Depot. It costs \$100 and up for a pro to repair stone countertops, according to HomeAdvisor.

### WANT SOMETHING NEW?

**What’s involved:** Your contractor or countertop installer will start by removing the existing counters and

taking measurements for the new ones. You’ll save big if you go with laminate, a durable synthetic material that comes in a variety of designs, including surprisingly realistic faux stone.

If there’s more room in your budget, consider using CR’s top-performing material, quartz, which is engineered from stone chips, resins, and pigments. If you have a small space, or need a piece for one area, such as an island, you might be able to save on a pricey material like quartz or granite by purchasing a remnant from a stone yard.

**Costs:** Prices can vary widely. If you want granite, for example, a basic beige pattern will cost less than something more exotic, such as golden Solaris. Laminate costs \$5 to \$25 per square foot; quartz, \$20 to \$60; granite, \$20 to \$60. Prices do not include installation.

### Instant Updates



**Asobu Insulated Portable Brewer KB900** \$40

**73** OVERALL SCORE



**Rejuvenate Wood Furniture & Floor Repair Markers\*** \$10



**Rachael Ray Create Delicious Cookware** \$150

**66** OVERALL SCORE

# Flooring

**YOU CAN TEMPORARILY** hide some damage in most types of flooring, but wood is the only kind you can fully refinish without replacing.

## FIXING UP WHAT YOU HAVE?

**What's involved:** A tile-repair kit can help fill in small chips. Fuse nicks and scratches in vinyl floors with liquid seam sealer. If you have a stain in a stone floor, try polishing it away with superfine steel wool. For scratched wood floors, look for a kit that has touch-up pens and wax sticks, to add a protective top finish. For larger blemishes, lightly sand, then apply a matching stain.

If your solid- or engineered-wood floor needs a rescue, you can hire a pro to refinish it. A cheaper DIY option: Brush on an enamel-based floor or porch paint. “Porch paints are designed to be weather-resistant, so they should handle spills well,” says de Paz at CR.

**Costs:** Around \$20 for spot-repair kits, available at home centers. For professional refinishing, \$3 to \$8 per square foot, according to HomeAdvisor.

## WANT SOMETHING NEW?

**What's involved:** A “floating” floor system is a great way to save. These consist of tiles or planks that snap together over your existing floor, saving you hundreds of dollars on installation. Tiles come in various materials, including waterproof luxury vinyl tile and porcelain, in patterns that mimic the expensive look of stone and wood, for about a third of the price. Installation is DIY-friendly (but you may want a pro to cut porcelain tile).

**Costs:** For luxury vinyl tile, \$2 to \$8 per square foot; porcelain, \$5 to \$8 per square foot. Add \$3 to \$22 per square foot if you want a pro to install it, according to HomeAdvisor.



TANYA A. CHRISTIAN

## My \$300 Kitchen Makeover



FOR RENTERS LIKE myself, replacing kitchen counters, backsplash, and flooring isn't really an option. Even if the landlord allows it, it's a pricey proposition when you won't benefit from the added value. So when I wanted a new look, I updated with DIY peel-and-stick products: contact paper for counters (an aesthetic if less-than-durable improvement), tiles for the backsplash, and vinyl “wood” planks for the floor. Here's what I learned along the way.

### 1. GET SAMPLES

Try out your materials to visualize the change before you buy. Wayfair

offers \$5 “quick-ship samples”; Home Depot and Lowe's sell single tiles and planks. You can search for “peel and stick sample” on Amazon to find samples for a small fee.

**2. ORDER MORE THAN YOU NEED** Purchase extra materials in case you make a mistake—10 percent more is a good estimate. Just be sure to measure correctly. It took me three separate Amazon orders to finish covering my counters because I didn't have my measurements right the first (or second) time.

**3. USE AN X-ACTO KNIFE** It lets you make precise cuts to

peel-and-stick materials. Other helpful tools include a tape measure, and a safety pin and a squeegee (or credit card)—if you get an air bubble under paper, puncture it with the pin and smooth it out with the squeegee. Amazon sells a peel-and-stick toolkit for less than \$10.

### 4. RECRUIT HELP

If you have high ceilings or heavy appliances, or you need someone to check your measurements, a partner—a friend, or hired help from a service such as Handy, Thumbtack, or TaskRabbit—can save the day.



### Put It All Together

Seeing your samples next to each other can help you make sure the colors, patterns, and scales look as good together in real life as they did on your computer screen.



# Appliances

**REPAIRS CAN MAKE** more sense than replacements, especially if you like the appliance, it's less than about 8 years old, and the repair will cost much less than a comparable new model. But also think of potential energy savings. A new Energy Star certified refrigerator could save you about \$150 in five years.

## FIXING UP WHAT YOU HAVE?

**What's involved:** You might be able to camouflage a flaw in the finish with a touch-up kit (for white or black finishes) or by rubbing very gently with a product such as Bar Keepers Friend (for stainless steel). For other repairs, try diagnosing the problem with an online search, then turn to a site like Repair Clinic for repair tutorials (or call in a pro).

**Costs:** Parts to fix an ice and water dispenser might set you back \$20 (for a switch) to \$300 (a new dispenser); replacing the dishwasher drain pump, \$50 to \$120; putting in a new oven bake element, \$40 to \$120, according to Repair Clinic. Add \$80 to \$200 if you need a pro. First, check the product's warranty to see if the repair is covered.

## WANT SOMETHING NEW?

**What's involved:** Once you decide to get rid of old appliances (some utilities offer cash for recycling old fridges), the trick is snagging a good deal on new ones. This has been more

difficult lately because of supply-chain disruption. Experts suggest investigating independent retailers, whose salespeople can often match the prices at big-box stores and may waive a delivery or removal fee. Need to replace everything? Buying a suite from one brand could save you up to 10 percent.

Also, consider buying a used appliance. "With a little legwork you can find a top-of-line appliance for a fraction of what it would cost new," says Jim Nanni, director of appliance testing at CR. You'll pay 50 to 90 percent off regular price for a pre-owned

appliance at Renovation Angel, and 35 to 90 percent off showroom models and new-in-box discontinued models, based on the brand, condition, and age. "Demand is booming due to our luxury bargain prices in a market with supply challenges," says Steve Feldman, founder and CEO of the nonprofit organization.

**Costs:** New top-freezer fridges (31 inches and wider) in our complete ratings start at \$775, dishwashers (24 inches) at \$280, electric smoothtop ranges (single oven) at \$465, and gas ranges (single oven) at \$400. Add \$100 to \$500 for installation, according to HomeAdvisor.

## When You Need a Little Help

KEEPING YOUR kitchen in tip-top shape requires know-how. CR's new home management app, Upkept, can help you keep track of all your home maintenance tasks, including in the kitchen—and teach you how to do them yourself. The app is

available at the Apple App Store and Google Play Store; service is free for 90 days, then \$4.99 per month.

If you need a pro, ask for recommendations from friends or on social media. Check with trade groups, such as the

National Association of the Remodeling Industry, or try home-services directories, such as Angi or Checkbook. Before you hire anyone, ask to see their license, proof of insurance, and a few references (and call all of them). Always insist on a

written contract. Labor costs are high right now, so if you can, plan your project for the offseason, when contractors might be willing to bargain. And if you're planning a future project, mention it. Contractors love repeat customers.

### Instant Updates



KitchenAid  
KMT2116CU  
Toaster \$80

83 OVERALL  
SCORE



NuWallpaper Scott  
Living Indigo Arden  
Self Adhesive  
Wallpaper\* \$40  
(covers 30.75 sq. ft.)





**Ratings** ➤ **The Short List** These refrigerators, ranges, dishwashers, countertop materials, and flooring products from CR's tests hit the sweet spot between top performance and great value—and look good doing it.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results	Features + Specs
<div><div></div><div></div></div>			Predicted reliability Owner satisfaction	Thermostat control Temperature uniformity Energy efficiency Noise Ease of use	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.) Exterior width (in.) Total usable capacity (cu. ft.) Fridge usable capacity (cu. ft.) Freezer usable capacity (cu. ft.) Energy cost/yr. (\$) Water dispenser Stainless/SS-look option Spillproof shelves

#### TOP-FREEZER REFRIGERATORS

💰 Whirlpool WRT112CZJZ	82	\$590	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	11.6	24	10.5	7.8	2.7	45		•	
✓ Frigidaire FFTR1835VW	73	\$675	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	18.3	30	15.3	11.2	4.1	53		•	
GE GTS22KSNRSS	68	\$910	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	21.9	33	17.8	11.6	6.2	58		•	
GE GTS17GSNRSS	64	\$725	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	16.6	28	12.9	9.4	3.5	51		•	

#### BOTTOM-FREEZER REFRIGERATORS

✓ LG LRDCS2603S	81	\$1,600	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	25.5	33	17.4	12.6	4.8	72		•	•
✓ GE GDE21ESKSS	77	\$1,590	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	21	30	14.6	10.9	3.7	74		•	•
Blomberg BRFB1822SSN	67	\$1,600	—	—	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	16.2	30	13.7	9.6	4.1	68		•	•
Hisense HBM17158SS	63	\$900	—	—	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	17.1	32	13.7	10.4	3.3	58		•	

#### FRENCH-DOOR REFRIGERATORS

💰 LG LFCS22520S	78	\$1,300	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	21.8	30	14.8	10.4	4.4	76		•	•
✓ LG LRFCS2503S	77	\$1,295	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	25.1	33	17.2	12.4	4.8	78		•	•
GE GNE27JSMSS \$1,950	71	\$1,800	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	27	36	21	15.1	5.9	82	Int.	•	•
Samsung RF220NCTASR	66	\$880	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	21.8	30	16	11.4	4.6	81		•	•
Samsung RF261BEAESR	63	\$1,650	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	25.5	36	16.7	12.2	4.5	80	Int.	•	•

#### SIDE-BY-SIDE REFRIGERATORS


💰 LG LSXS26326S	79	\$1,300	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	26.2	36	20.8	13.8	7	92	Ext.	•	
💰 Kenmore 51783	71	\$1,450	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	20.6	36	14.6	9.8	4.8	84	Ext.	•	•
✓ Amana ASI2175GRS	63	\$1,155	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	21.4	33	12.7	9	3.7	85	Ext.	•	

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first five years. **Owner satisfaction**

reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the refrigerator they bought. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (—), the model receives reliability and satisfaction scores

based on weighted category averages. **Thermostat control** assesses the ability to reach and maintain a set temperature despite changes in room temperature. **Temperature uniformity** is the ability to mitigate warm and cold spots in the fridge and freezer compartments. **Energy efficiency**

indicates energy consumption based on usable storage space and the national average electricity cost. **Noise** reflects quietness of operation based on noise-meter readings and a panel of listeners. **Ease of use** assesses layout and features. **Price** is approximate retail.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Cooktop, high	Cooktop, low	Baking	Broiling	Oven capacity	Self-cleaning	High-power elements	Medium-power elements	Low-power elements	Convection mode	Double oven	Warning element on cooktop	Stainless steel available

ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOP RANGES (30-INCH)

\$ LG LREL6321S	86	\$700	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	NA	2	0	2			•	•
✓ Whirlpool WGE745C0FS	84	\$1,500	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•	•	•	•
✓ Samsung NE63A6511SS	83	\$900	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	1	2	1	•		•	•
✓ GE JB735SPSS	81	\$820	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•		•	•
LG LRE3060ST	80	\$700	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	NA	2	0	2			•	•
Samsung NE59J7850WS	79	\$1,400	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	1	2	1	•	•	•	•
Samsung NE59R4321SS	75	\$720	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•		•	•
Frigidaire FFEF3054TS	73	\$720	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2			•	•

GAS AND DUAL-FUEL RANGES (30-INCH)


\$ Samsung NX58R5601SS	79	\$900	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	2	2	1	•		NA	•
✓ LG LRGL5823S	74	\$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	2	2	1	•		NA	•
✓ GE JGBS86SPSS	73	\$1,395	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	NA	NA	2	2	1	•	•	NA	•
✓ GE JGB735SPSS	72	\$1,080	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	2	2	1	•		NA	•
Frigidaire FFGF3054TS	70	\$765	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	2	2	1			NA	•

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction (see How We Test on

page 33). Cooktop, high is a measure of how quickly the highest-power burner brings water to a near-boil. Cooktop, low indicates how steadily a low-power

burner maintains low heat and the highest-power burner maintains a simmer. Baking rates how evenly the oven bakes cakes and cookies. Broiling

measures how well the oven browns hamburger patties.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing	Drying	Energy use	Noise	Cycle time (min.)	Ample flatware slots	Adjustable upper rack	Adjustable tines	Remaining time display	Self-cleaning filter		

DISHWASHERS


\$ Bosch Ascenta SHE3AR72UC	89	\$600	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	95	•	•	•				
✓ Bosch 300 DLX Series SHS863WD5N	85	\$770	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	150	•	•	•	•			
✓ Bosch 100 Series SHEM3AY55N	84	\$610	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	150	•	•	•	•	•		
Ikea Essentiell (80.655.85)	79	\$600	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	135		•	•	•	•	•	

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner

satisfaction. To score washing performance, we run the normal or equivalent cycle to clean a full load with

10 place settings. Drying performance is our assessment of how thoroughly a dishwasher dries plastic cups. Energy

use is based on our test cycle. A panel of testers judge noise levels by listening to each machine through its entire cycle.


Material	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				
		Per square foot	Resists stains	Resists cutting	Resists heat	Resists abrasion	Resists impacts
COUNTERTOPS							
Quartz (Engineered Stone)	84	\$20-\$60	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️
Granite	81	\$20-\$60	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️
Recycled Glass (Penetrating Sealer)	69	\$25-\$100	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️
Laminate	68	\$5-\$25	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️
Tile (Ceramic and Porcelain)	67	\$5-\$20	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️
Ultracompact (Dekton)	63	\$50-\$100	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️
Solid Surfacing	53	\$15-\$50	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score is based on the performance of the materials in all our tests. **Resists stains** shows how well

a material avoids stains from 20 common foods and household products; **cutting**, damage from knives. **Resists heat**

gauges how well materials hold up against damage and discoloration from a hot pot; **abrasion**, damage from

a weighted sanding block. **Resists impacts** reflects how well it withstands weights dropped from up to 3½ feet.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs					
		Per square foot	Resists foot traffic	Resists scratches	Resists stains	Resists dents	Water resistance	Resistance to slipping	Resists sunlight (UV)	Sq. ft. per box	Surface smoothness	Installation	Light shades	Medium shades	Dark shades

VINYL FLOORING															
💰 Shaw Matrix Regency Gunstock Oak LX90100706 (Lowe's)	78	\$2.00	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	28	Very textured	Floating	•	•	•
✔️ SmartCore Ultra Blue Ridge Pine 50SLVF603 (Lowe's)	69	\$3.30	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	16	Textured	Floating	•	•	•

PORCELAIN TILE FLOORING															
💰 LifeProof Shadow Wood LP33624HD1PR (Home Depot)	93	\$2.00	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	15	Textured	Thinset	•	•	•
💰 Marazzi Montagna Dapple Gray ULM7 (Home Depot)	92	\$1.50	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	15	Textured	Thinset	•	•	•

LAMINATE FLOORING															
💰 Lumber Liquidators AquaSeal 24 Tapestry Oak 10047713	92	\$2.30	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	16	Textured	Floating	•		
💰 Pergo Outlast+ Vintage Pewter Oak LF000848 (Home Depot)	85	\$3.00	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	20	Textured	Floating		•	

ENGINEERED WOOD FLOORING															
✔️ Lumber Liquidators AquaSeal 72 Engineered Bamboo Water Resistant Click Strand Toffee 10046516	80	\$7.00	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	15	Slightly textured	Floating or glue		•	
✔️ Lumber Liquidators Bellawood Geneva White Oak 10045563	71	\$7.00	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	24	Slightly textured	Nail, glue, or floating		•	

> Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org).

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score is based on the performance in all our tests. **Resists foot traffic** denotes how quickly wear

was noticeable after using an abrasion tester. **Resists scratches** indicates the ability to withstand scratches. **Resists**

**stains** indicates how resistant the flooring is to staining from products such as mustard. **Resists dents** shows

resistance to damage from dropped weights. **Resists sunlight** indicates how the floor stood up to ultraviolet light.

# How to (Finally) Get Rid of Stuff

Our decluttering tips will help you figure out what you no longer need and the best ways to get rid of things. You might even make some money in the process.

BY KEVIN DOYLE • ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAM ISLAND



I have no room for all of these books. What should I do with them?



How long do I have to keep tax info and receipts?



Is it okay to toss these old paint cans in my garbage?





S

## sealed in a plastic bag

in the back of Kris Schwartz's bedroom closet is the student nurse's uniform that her mother wore 80 years ago, complete with pinafore and removable cuffs. Her mother's

nursing cape hangs in a downstairs closet, and a journal her mother-in-law kept is safely stashed in the desk drawer of a home office. These relics are just a metaphorical speck in the "tsunami of stuff" Schwartz says she and her husband have accumulated in their Maine home over the decades.

"I have loads of books, mementos, baby clothes, and letters from people I've forgotten about stuffed in my closets and my cellar," Schwartz says. "The garage is so full it's sometimes hard to get a car into. Most of it serves no purpose or function, but I can't get rid of it."

Marie Kondo's approach to tidying up may have inspired her fans to fold their underwear like origami, but it took a pandemic for many Americans to start to deal with their surfeit of stuff. "A lot of people suddenly needed to find space for two home offices as well as schooling at home," says Cindy Sullivan, president of the nonprofit Institute for Challenging Disorganization. "The pandemic definitely contributed to a lot of decluttering." Many secondhand and resale stores, hauling companies, and professional organizers have reported an uptick in business.

Apart from the many practical reasons to free up space—having to climb over boxes to get to your car can really slow you down—living in an environment strewn with stuff can have negative emotional consequences. "The more clutter people are surrounded by, the less sense of home and the less sense of life satisfaction they have," says Joseph Ferrari, PhD, a professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago and an expert on the clutter-procrastination link.

If you're finding yourself feeling overwhelmed by your possessions, our five rules can help you lighten up and possibly earn a little money or help others in the process.



## RULE 1

# get ready to let go

**FOR DAWN CASTAGNA**, a health industry executive in New York, getting started is the hardest part. "Analysis paralysis definitely applies to me," she admits. "My wife says, 'We haven't used it, so it's going.' But I'm like, 'Well, I don't know. Who would be the right person to give it to? Should we sell it?' And when I'm not sure about the right way to get rid of something, I just stop." If you're facing similar struggles,

these three questions can help jump-start the process:

### 1. Do I really need it?

Anything you don't use or have multiples of can probably go. "Nobody needs 18 spatulas," Ferrari says.

### 2. Can I easily replace it?

Amanda Scudder, MSW, a professional organizer in Richmond, Va., recommends the \$20/20-minute rule: Anything that would cost \$20 or less and take 20 minutes or less to

## A TAXING MATTER



**Q:** My file cabinet is completely stuffed with old tax returns and receipts. How long do I need to keep these?

**A:** Keeping them for three years after you've filed is usually enough. Some people (like those who sometimes fail to file) should keep them forever. For details, search "How long should I keep records?" at IRS.gov. And see "Prep Things Right," on the facing page, for details on how to dispose of old tax info.



acquire again can probably go without creating much regret.

### **3. If I'm not using it now, will I want it in five or 10 years?**

"If it's already in storage, ask yourself why you need to keep it," says Amy Tokos, president of the National Association of Productivity & Organizing Professionals.

You also want to start small. Instead of tackling the garage, start with clothes. "Once you see how much lighter and more energized you feel after decluttering your wardrobe," Scudder says, "you can take that energy into tougher categories."

Ferrari recommends not handling anything you're considering getting rid of. "It's better to have a friend or professional organizer hold it up for you," he says. "Once you touch it, you're more likely to keep it."

Ground rules also help. For photos, consider deciding ahead of time that you'll toss all doubles and blurry images. "The fewer items of sentimental value you keep, the more valuable they'll actually be to you," Tokos says.

## **RULE 2**

# **prep things right**

**A FEAR OF** billing disputes makes it difficult for CR member B. Reinhardt to part with mounds of old paper. "I feel fantastic when I donate things other people need," she says. "Unfortunately, nobody needs my receipts, so I have them all as far back as 2006, zipped into an old suitcase hidden in my closet." Other people may have a hard time letting go of credit card statements and other seemingly important papers due to worry about security issues or identity theft.

When it comes to paper, you only need to hang on to birth and death certificates, passports, a few years of tax records (see "A Taxing Matter," at left), wills, medical powers of attorney, marriage licenses, Social Security cards, medical records, and a handful of other documents. Shred the rest to protect yourself against fraud, experts say. (And be sure to fully empty items like purses and pants pockets before getting rid of them.) Shred or rip apart junk mail to prevent thieves from,

saying, responding to credit card offers sent to you. Many UPS and FedEx branches and office-supply stores offer shredding for a fee, and some businesses and communities sponsor free shredding events.

Digital devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones may also contain financial documents, photos, and other private information that could make you vulnerable to identity theft. Backing up the contents, erasing computer hard drives, and restoring the devices to factory settings offer a significant level of protection. Find online instructions for erasing hard drives by searching for "What to do before you sell" at support.apple.com for Apple products and support.microsoft.com for PCs. (The only way to completely protect yourself is to remove and destroy the computer's hard drive. Check ifixit.com for tutorials.) For smartphones, search "Restore phone to factory settings" and the brand.

## **COMPUTER CONUNDRUM**



**Q: What can I do with my old laptop? And how do I save—and safeguard—the photos and other data on it?**

**A:** You can back up data and photos on another computer, an external drive, or in the cloud. Then, after taking security precautions (see "Prep Things Right," at left), you can donate, recycle, or try to sell it. Some municipalities and schools collect e-waste, often around Earth Day each April. There's a robust online market for used electronics, and trade-in programs from manufacturers like Apple and chains like Best Buy.

## **RULE 3**

# **sell smarter**

**SOME OF YOUR** unneeded stuff may mean money in the bank if you can unload it via an online option. In addition to eBay, there are a number of web- and app-based sales platforms that give you access to a much larger pool of potential buyers than a traditional yard or tag sale.

CR member Deborah DeMaria says she has made

several thousand dollars over the past couple of years selling jewelry and clothing online. "You may only get 20 cents on the dollar for some things," she says. "But if it's been sitting unworn in your closet or your garage for 10 years, you have to ask yourself 'Do I want it there another 10 years or would I rather have \$200 for it?'"

Before you sign on with any

platform, research the value of that vintage vase or extra tool set you want to sell. One way to do that is to check for the "sold" price of similar items. "There's almost nothing that someone else hasn't already sold on eBay or Craigslist," DeMaria says. Then consider the time and energy it may take to sell it. "Will it be a 10-hour project to earn \$50?" Tokos says. "You

have to decide whether that's worth it to you." The rules, types of items sold, and fees and payouts vary from platform to platform, so look at several to decide which one might work best for you. For instance:

■ **Facebook Marketplace** features a wide range of items including vehicles, electronics, clothing, home furnishings, office supplies, and sporting goods. You post descriptions and photos, and make arrangements for payment (such as cash or PayPal) and delivery (mail or in-person pickup). "My wife usually donates things," Castagna says, "but I recently tried Facebook Marketplace to sell four air conditioners that had been sitting unused in my garage. I was amazed that they sold in 12 minutes and I made \$800."

Facebook takes a 5 percent selling fee for any items that are shipped. If your item doesn't sell, you can opt to offer it free.

■ **Poshmark** focuses on apparel, accessories, and beauty and home goods. You list your item and ship it to the buyer with a prepaid shipping label that Poshmark provides. For all

sales under \$15, it takes a flat \$2.95; with higher sales, it keeps 20 percent.

■ **ThredUp**, which sells women's and children's clothing in new or like-new condition, has you send your garments directly to it to be sold. You can earn an immediate payout on items that are on trend, in season, and in excellent condition; you get paid for others after they sell. The company says it pays between 3 percent and 80 percent of the final selling price. (Garments that sell for \$200 or more have the highest payout.)

■ **The RealReal** is for designer and other high-end men's, women's, and children's clothing, watches, artwork, furniture—even skis and snowboards. You ship items to the company for free. (In limited areas, you can schedule an at-home pickup or drop off at a retail location of The RealReal). You'll typically net between 40 and 85 percent of the selling price. For certain types of items, including fine jewelry, watches, and handbags, you may get a payout before they're even sold.



#### A FITTING GOODBYE



**Q:** I paid a fortune for a dress and wore it only a few times. Now it's two sizes too small, and I don't think I'll be wearing it again. How can I sell it?

**A:** Some apps and websites, such as The RealReal (see above), Tradesy (tradesy.com), and Vestiaire (us.vestiairecollective.com), specialize in reselling high-end goods, including apparel. Check ahead of time for the list of brands they accept and to find out what percentage of the sale price you can expect.

#### RULE 4

## donate wisely

**EXPERTS SAY THAT** donating is often the right move for people who find decluttering especially daunting or are short on time. "If you're overwhelmed by your clutter, you don't want to spend a lot of time figuring out how to get rid of it," Tokos says. "That's when you should consider taking it all to a charitable organization and be done with it."

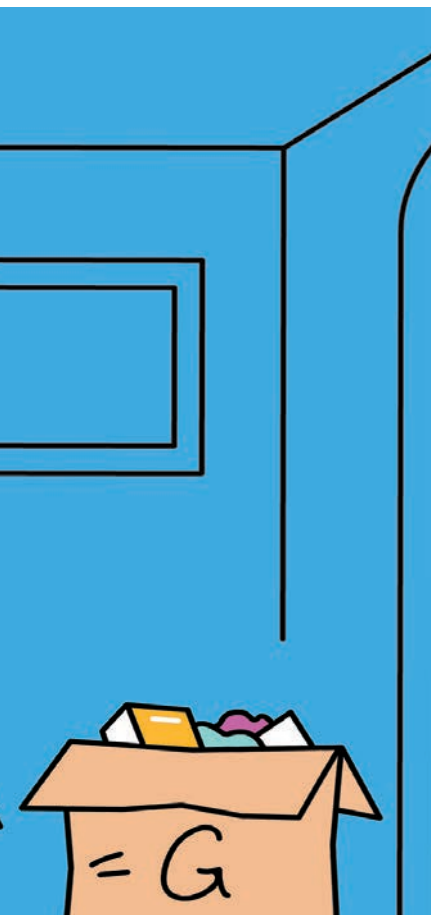
Donating can also earn you a charitable tax deduction, which may lower your tax bill. Search "Tax exempt organizations" at IRS.gov to find those that qualify, and remember to get receipts.

The items should be clean, safe, and in good working order. "We average about 2 million dollars in

trash-removal costs every year for items people dump at our stores that we cannot resell," says Marla Eby, a spokeswoman for Goodwill Southern California, whose stores—like all of Goodwill's 3,000 outlets in the U.S. and Canada—collect and sell donated items to support education and job-placement programs. "If something's in really bad shape, it's better to recycle it or throw it away." Note that some organizations won't accept donations of child car seats, cribs, and other infant equipment that could have been recalled.

Policies vary, so make sure you find an organization that meets your needs. For instance, the





## RULE 5

# dispose of it properly

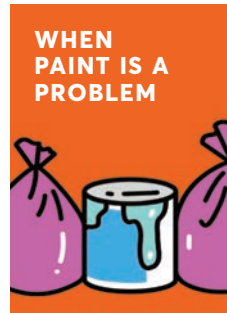
**CERTAIN ITEMS NEED** to be disposed of with special care. “Some insecticides and other household chemicals can be really dangerous if they get into the soil,” says Rolf Halden, PhD, director of the Center for Environmental Health Engineering at Arizona State University. Batteries are loaded with lead and cadmium, and shouldn’t be tossed in the garbage, he adds.

Earth911.com has an extensive database of sites that accept household hazardous waste, such as fuel, used motor oil, pesticides, and compact fluorescent lightbulbs, which contain small amounts of mercury. Check to see if your community has a pickup program for such items.

Many big-box stores accept batteries for recycling (check

call2recycle.org). CVS, Walgreens, and some other pharmacies provide bins for unused medications. (Go to [disposemy meds.org](http://disposemy meds.org) for nearby independent pharmacies that offer this service.) The Responsible Appliance Disposal program ([epa.gov/rad/consumers](http://epa.gov/rad/consumers)) lists utilities and groups that will pick up and recycle large appliances without charge.

Finally, if you prefer to outsource your offloading, you can pay a company to do it for you. The Junkluggers, for instance, an eco-friendly firm that operates in 29 states and the District of Columbia, removes unwanted possessions, donates or recycles anything that’s not trash, and disposes of the rest in accordance with local laws.



**Q:** Old paint cans are stacked up in my garage. Can I just put them in my garbage?

**A:** Cans containing dried latex paint can go out with the regular garbage. But oil-based paints are considered hazardous waste, so contact your sanitation department or check [earth911.com](http://earth911.com) or [paintcare.org](http://paintcare.org) for information on where to safely drop leftovers.

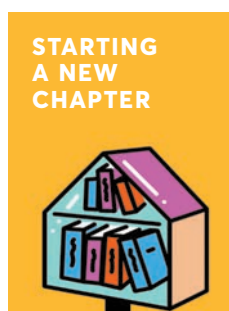
Salvation Army will pick up large donations and items such as furniture. You can schedule a pickup at [satruck.org](http://satruck.org), but note that this service has been suspended in some areas due to COVID-19.

Some charitable groups focus on particular items or needs. Habitat for Humanity ReStore—nonprofit stores that support the mission of providing housing—accepts appliances, furniture, bathtubs, building materials, and other home goods. [Cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://Cellphonesforsoldiers.com) sells secondhand cell phones and tablets to refurbishers and recyclers; proceeds go to provide international calling cards and emergency funding to troops. Lions Clubs collect old eyeglasses at participating Walmart stores to give away or recycle, while The Hearing Aid Project

([hearingaid donations.org](http://hearingaid donations.org)) refurbishes hearing aids for low-income people nationwide. [Dressforsuccess.org](http://Dressforsuccess.org) and [careergear.org](http://careergear.org) accept professional attire to distribute to women and men, respectively, who can make good use of it.

If you’d like to share with people in your local community, consider groups like the Freecycle Network ([freecycle.org](http://freecycle.org)) and BuyNothing (search Facebook Groups for one nearby). Freecycle, for instance, has more than 5,000 local groups worldwide, where members give and get free items.

“The window air conditioner you’re replacing with a new one is basically trash to you but could change someone else’s life,” says Freecycle’s founder, Deron Beal. (These donations don’t qualify as charitable deductions.)



**Q:** I’m downsizing and don’t have room for all of my books. What should I do with them?

**A:** Unless they’re first or signed editions, books can be a tough sell. (Check with a book dealer or sites like [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com), [bookfinder.com](http://bookfinder.com), and [biblio.com](http://biblio.com) if you’re not sure.) Consider donating to a nearby Little Free Library ([littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org)), which has more than 100,000 book-sharing spots worldwide. Or try a community library, hospice, or charity like Goodwill. Groups such as [operationpaperback.org](http://operationpaperback.org) distribute gently used books to people in the military. And if you can’t find a home for your old paperbacks, recycle them.

# THE BEST NEW WAYS TO WORK OUT AT HOME

Gyms are now open across the country, but many Americans are still enjoying getting fit from their living rooms—with trainers patched in by smartphone, stationary bikes hooked up to live classes, and a community of fellow exercisers to keep us motivated.

BY JANET LEE • ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOE DARROW

**B**ack when a COVID-19 vaccine seemed a distant hope, many avid exercisers thought that breaking a sweat in their living room would be a temporary measure. They bought WiFi-connected bikes, subscribed to apps with live classes, followed local trainers on Zoom, or just popped in some earbuds and rolled out a yoga mat on the floor. A lot of them realized the convenience, fun, and potential cost-savings that online workouts and fitness apps can offer. Some even wondered if a traditional gym membership was necessary anymore.

“My workout ‘commute’ has been cut down by an hour,” says Alex Jackson, 44, who lives in Kansas City and bought a Peloton bike earlier this year. “I can do 20 to 30 minutes

of cardio at home, three to four days a week, which is the perfect option.”

Online workouts were becoming popular before the coronavirus hit, of course, but this year they jumped to the top of the American College of Sports Medicine’s annual fitness trends survey. And sales of free weights and exercise bikes have increased significantly, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association.

Now, even people who have returned enthusiastically to in-person gyms are mixing in versions of their at-home pandemic routines, a combination that may prove to be the new normal.

Whatever the mix, our guide will help you design an at-home exercise plan that works for you.









## GETTING STARTED

Streaming a workout can make it easier to create and maintain an exercise habit because it eliminates three big excuses: inconvenience (all you need is a smartphone, tablet, or computer and space to move), the high cost (they typically run \$10 to \$40 a month), and a lack of time (no more commuting to a club, and some routines are as short as 7 minutes).

In addition, many of these apps have features designed to keep you motivated, which is important when you're exercising solo, says Vanessa Kercher, a clinical assistant professor in the School of Public Health at Indiana University in Bloomington. "If you can get results about beating your own record or meeting a goal, or get high fives from other participants, those are really important for your intrinsic motivation," she explains.

To make sense of the many options, start by considering four factors: your budget, the gym equipment required, the technology you need to have at home, and whether you'll benefit from a built-in community.

### 1 BUDGET

Many online workouts and exercise apps cost between a few dollars and \$20 a month. Compare that with gym memberships, which average about \$50 a month.

### 2 GYM EQUIPMENT

Many apps will have body-weight-only options or require only minimal equipment, such as dumbbells. But if you're looking for cardio and don't like running or biking outside, you may need to invest in a treadmill

or exercise bike. And some options require access to expensive cardio machines if you want the full connected and interactive experience.

### 3 TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Most online programs will have apps accessible on a phone, tablet, or smart TV. To just Zoom with your trainer or a workout buddy, any device with a camera will do. Some apps require access to a particular device, like an Apple Watch.

### 4 COMMUNITY

For many exercisers, a key feature of online workouts is the motivation and inspiration from other people. In some cases, a dynamic instructor will keep you going, with no interaction required. Other options, such as those with internet-connected equipment, can deliver feedback from instructors or let you interact with other virtual participants. Apps may also let you interact with other users, especially on social media.

## WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Once you know the variables, consider which mix is the best fit. The options generally fall into three categories, each with pros and cons. If you're having trouble choosing, consider a test drive. Many programs offer a free trial.

### If You Crave Variety

**CONSIDER:** Exercise apps or streaming workouts.

**THE PERKS:** Using one of these is like having a huge collection of workout videos. Some "classes" are streamed live at set times; others are available on demand. You access them with a phone, tablet, or smart TV app, or using your computer. Phone apps are portable, of course, so you can use them at a park or gym. (Aaptiv, for example, which specializes in audio workouts, is \$15 per month.)

Some of them, like Apple Fitness+ (\$10 per month) and Obé Fitness (\$27 per month) offer multiple types of classes (strength training, cardio, dance, yoga). Others, like Barre3's ballet-inspired workouts (\$29 per month), Seven's 7-minute workouts (\$10 a month), and SilverSneakers (for seniors; free with some Medicare Advantage plans), are narrower in focus. Most offer a variety of class lengths across all fitness levels.

**THE DOWNSIDE:** There's not much interactivity. You see the instructors—live or recorded—but nobody actually sees you. So people who thrive on the energy of others, as in a live class, may find these lacking. And you won't get much feedback or progress tracking unless you have a fitness watch; self-motivation is key.

### For Real-Time Feedback

**CONSIDER:** Live virtual training.

**THE PERKS:** If you're missing one-on-one trainer sessions or live group



classes but don't feel comfortable doing them in person—or you want the convenience of popping into a live session from wherever you are—you can access a class or trainer through a web conferencing tool like Zoom. Even some gyms and studios that have returned to in-person instruction are still offering online versions.

Another benefit of live virtual training is the real-time two-way connection. A personal trainer can see you and correct your form if necessary, for example, or an aerobics instructor can give you an inspirational shout

out. And there's a sense of community. You can see others working out during group classes, and they can see you.

Online versions of live classes took off in 2020 out of necessity. For example, Lisa Kinder, a personal trainer and fitness instructor in Orange County, Calif., was working at an upscale national chain and doing one-on-one training when the pandemic hit. Two days after the gym shut down she taught her first online class. "I just listened to the community," says Kinder, who taught several virtual classes a day during the height of the

pandemic—and still does it at night.

**THE DOWNSIDE:** These sessions tend to be run by independent instructors, not big fitness companies, so finding one that works for you may require word-of-mouth recommendations and trial and error. Also, this approach doesn't offer automatic stat tracking; a personal trainer can help monitor your progress, but with group classes, it's up to you.

### For the Studio Experience

**CONSIDER:** A connected fitness system.

**THE PERKS:** If you're willing and able to pay top dollar, you can take

## BUILD YOUR OWN 'PELOTON' SYSTEM

**PELOTON IS OUR** top-rated exercise bike, but it costs \$1,895 plus \$39 a month for unlimited classes. Want the perks of a connected system at a smaller price? You can assemble something like the Peloton experience for less by pairing a conventional exercise bike with a reading shelf, a tablet or phone, and a workout app. Just know that without a true integrated system, you won't get detailed performance tracking or be able to compete with others on the leaderboard. Here's how two DIY Peloton options stack up against the real thing. (To see our full exercise bike ratings, go to [CR.org/bikes0921](https://www.crdigital.com/cr/org/bikes0921).)



### DIY BUDGET PELOTON

<b>BIKE</b>	<b>\$500</b>	Finer Form Indoor Exercise Bike
		<b>61</b> OVERALL SCORE
+		
<b>DEVICE</b>	<b>\$0</b>	Your existing smartphone or tablet
+		
<b>APP</b>	<b>\$12.99</b>	Monthly Peloton digital membership
=		
<b>COST</b>	<b>\$656</b>	For your first year

### REAL PELOTON

<b>BIKE</b>	<b>\$1,895</b>
<b>88</b> OVERALL SCORE	
+	
<b>MONTHLY ALL-ACCESS MEMBERSHIP</b>	<b>\$39</b>
+	
<b>COST YOUR FIRST YEAR</b>	<b>\$2,363</b>

### DIY PELOTON

<b>BIKE</b> Sole SB900	<b>\$1,000</b>
<b>80</b> OVERALL SCORE	
+	
<b>MONTHLY PELOTON DIGITAL MEMBERSHIP</b>	<b>\$12.99</b>
+	
<b>IPAD MINI</b>	<b>\$400</b>
+	
<b>COST YOUR FIRST YEAR</b>	<b>\$1,556</b>

### OTHER BIKE OPTIONS

Schwinn IC4	<b>\$900</b>
<b>78</b> OVERALL SCORE	
ProForm Studio Bike Pro 2 89ioii	<b>\$1,600</b>
<b>72</b> OVERALL SCORE	
Echelon EX-5S	<b>\$1,500</b>
<b>62</b> OVERALL SCORE	

buzz-inducing studio cycling classes or even stunning treks in your own home. The Peloton Bike and NordicTrack Commercial 2450 Treadmill are good examples of how an exercise machine with an integrated touch screen, connected via the internet to classes and performance tracking, can transform your cardio workouts.

The magic ingredients here are the live, interactive virtual group classes led by the sort of engaging instructors you'd find in front of packed gym classes. The technology lets them engage with you directly while keeping an eye on your performance.

Peloton offers a variety of classes for every level, time commitment, and musical taste. For \$39 per month plus the \$1,895 cost of its basic bike, you get an all-access membership with

real-time performance tracking and the ability to see how others in your class are doing. Members can give one another virtual high fives or schedule sessions with friends to work out “together.” (As with the \$12.99-a-month stand-alone Peloton App—which you can use without buying a Peloton bike—the all-access membership also includes entry to hundreds of nonbike classes.)

Some of these devices can make your workout more challenging. The iFIT Interactive Technology—available with the NordicTrack Treadmill and other types of equipment—will automatically adjust the incline, speed, or resistance to match an instructor's prompts or your virtual surroundings. The \$2,500 high-end Peloton+ bike can also adjust resistance based on instructor cues.

In the newest equipment subcategory

—wall-mounted connected fitness systems—the Mirror, \$1,495 plus a \$39 per month fee, is a video screen shaped (as its name suggests) like a full-length mirror, in which a virtual trainer coaches you through fitness classes. Camera-enabled technology adapts the workout to your goals, and you can do one-on-one competitions with other users. Another wall-mounted system, the Tonal (\$2,995 plus \$49 per month), has an interactive touch screen and fold-out arms supporting “digital weights” (electronically adjusted resistance cables, not heavy metal plates) for strength training.

**THE DOWNSIDE:** They're expensive, with big up-front equipment costs and sizable monthly fees. If you want something similar but for less money, see “Build Your Own ‘Peloton’ System,” on page 45.

## MY FITNESS FACE-OFF: APPLE VS. PELOTON



**APPLE RECENTLY LAUNCHED** its workout app, Fitness+, which is accessible only if you have an Apple Watch and iOS device. CR asked me to use my two-plus decades of experience evaluating and designing fitness programs to compare Apple Fitness+ to the Peloton app. You can get a great workout using either, but there are a few areas where one outshines the other. (For our full comparison, go to [CR.org/applepeloton0921](https://CR.org/applepeloton0921).) —Janet Lee

### FOR BEGINNERS

#### ADVANTAGE:

#### Apple Fitness+

Both offer beginner routines. But Apple Fitness+ makes it somewhat easier to get started, with a choice of numerous classes dedicated to inexperienced users right on the opening dashboard. The Peloton lineup might feel daunting at first for a newbie who's not sure where to begin.

### WORKOUT VARIETY

#### ADVANTAGE:

#### Peloton

Apple is adding new classes regularly, but Peloton still has more variety, including more audio-only instruction for outdoor workouts, more types of yoga, and more options for strength training.


### FOR COMMUNITY

#### ADVANTAGE:

#### Peloton

For users who like exercising with other people—something sorely missing when you're doing reps in your living room—Peloton has live classes, where you can see who's there with you and even send them a high five. Apple Fitness+ doesn't.

**Ratings** ➤ **The Long Run** To test treadmill durability, CR engineers designed two machine rigs, giant metal drums covered in rubber “feet” that run along each treadmill and simulate half a year of use.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features						
			Ergonomics	Construction	Ease of use	Exercise range	User safety	Weight capacity	Quick speed controls	Quick incline controls	Chest strap included	Heart-rate control programs	Reading shelf	Cup holder

#### NONFOLDING TREADMILLS

✓ True Performance 100	87	\$3,700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	350	•	•	•	•	•	2
💰 Sole TT8	84	\$2,500	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	400	•	•		•	•	4
✓ Precor TRM 243	84	\$3,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	500				•	•	2
✓ Landice L7 Pro Sports	83	\$4,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	400	•	•	•		•	2
✓ SportsArt T615	81	\$3,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	400	•			•	•	2
💰 True M30	81	\$2,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	300	•	•	•	•	•	2

#### FOLDING TREADMILLS

💰 Sole F80	86	\$1,600	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	375	•	•	•	•	•	2
💰 Horizon 7.0AT	85	\$1,000	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	325	•	•		•	•	2
✓ NordicTrack Commercial 2450	84	\$2,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	300	•	•	•		•	2
✓ ProForm SMART Pro 2000	83	\$1,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	300	•	•			•	2
✓ Spirit XT485	83	\$2,400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	425	•	•	•	•	•	2
✓ LifeSpan TR5500i	82	\$2,600	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	350	•	•		•	•	2

#### BUDGET FOLDING TREADMILLS

✓ Nautilus T616	84	\$1,150	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	300	•	•	•	•	•	2
✓ Sole F63	81	\$1,000	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	325	•	•	•	•	•	4
✓ Schwinn 830	79	\$950	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	300	•	•		•	•	2
✓ Xterra TRX4500	77	\$1,200	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	300	•	•	•	•	•	2
✓ LifeSpan TR1200i	73	\$1,200	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	300	•	•		•	•	2

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/treadmills](https://www.consumerreports.org/treadmills).

**HOW WE TEST:** **Ergonomics** is how well the machine accommodates the needs of different users. **Construction** considers our perception of quality

based on the motor, deck, belt, and the results of the durability test. **Ease of use** indicates how easy it is to read the display and use the

programs and controls. **Exercise range** is how well each machine provides an effective workout for users of various fitness levels. **User safety**

assesses safety features such as emergency stop buttons, safety-key operation, and the possibility of striking the motor housing.

# THE QUEST FOR SAFER CHICKEN

Why are potentially deadly bacteria legally allowed in our poultry?  
And how can you and your family stay safe?

by **Rachel Rabkin Peachman**

**A**manda Craten used to love cooking, especially big Sicilian dinners prepared for her extended family, relishing the family bonding as much as the food. But that changed in 2013 after Craten's son and mother-in-law became seriously ill with *Salmonella* Heidelberg, a virulent, antibiotic-resistant strain of bacteria that was traced to chicken from Foster Farms, a leading poultry processor.

That contaminated chicken was part of a salmonella

outbreak that spanned 16 months and sickened 634 people across the country, more than a third of whom had to be hospitalized. And for Craten's family, in Arizona, the consequences were devastating.

Her mother-in-law had recently received a diagnosis of an aggressive form of cancer. When she developed a salmonella infection, she experienced a fever and gastrointestinal symptoms so severe she had to postpone chemotherapy. She died of cancer a year later, says Craten, who adds that she still wonders whether that delay in treatment played a role.







Shortly after her mother-in-law's bout with salmonella, Craten's son Noah, then 17 months old, also developed a fever. Although he regularly shared meals with his grandmother, the family's pediatrician ruled out salmonella because Noah didn't have serious gastrointestinal symptoms, Craten says. But Noah's condition only worsened. At night "he would wake up every 4 or 5 hours just screaming [with a] fever of 103.5 when the Motrin or the Tylenol wore off," Craten remembers.

Desperate, Craten finally took Noah to the hospital, where an MRI revealed a life-threatening brain abscess that required emergency surgery. Testing showed that the abscess was caused by the same strain of salmonella that had sickened Noah's grandmother, according to a lawsuit the family won against Foster Farms.

Noah is now a happy, outgoing 9-year-old, Craten says, but the infection has had long-term repercussions. He was left with a brain injury affecting his vision, speech, learning, memory, and behavior. Though the Cratens have a fund from their verdict that helps cover Noah's medical care, it remains a struggle to get him all the therapy he needs.

## LETHAL BUT LEGAL BACTERIA

**CARING FOR NOAH** is not the only battle Craten continues to fight. She has also become an advocate for food safety, serving on the board of Stop Foodborne Illness, a nonprofit group. In her role there she has learned just how vulnerable consumers are to dangerous bacteria in their food.

That includes not just salmonella but also campylobacter. Together, those two bacteria sicken almost 1.9 million people each year, hospitalizing

### BY THE NUMBERS

## SALMONELLA AND CAMPYLOBACTER

51%

of bacterial foodborne illnesses in the U.S. come from those two pathogens. <sup>①</sup>

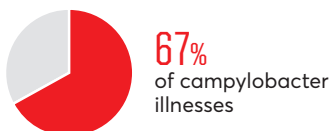
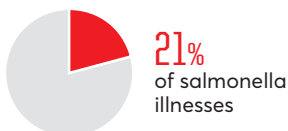
The bacteria sicken a lot of people each year. <sup>②</sup>

1.9M  
illnesses

28,000  
hospitalizations

450  
deaths

Chicken and turkey account for: <sup>②</sup>



28,000 and killing about 450.

Contaminated chicken is often responsible. While salmonella can be spread through many foods, poultry is a leading source. In fact, chicken and turkey accounted for about a fifth of the salmonella outbreak infections, according to 2018 estimates. For campylobacter-related infections, chicken and turkey made up an even higher percentage—a full two-thirds.

Most alarming to Craten: Those illnesses don't stem from the unlawful distribution of contaminated chicken. Instead, under rules set by the Department of Agriculture, poultry processors can legally distribute their products even if they know they may contain harmful bacteria.

The USDA, in fact, allows 9.8 percent of the whole chickens it tests to be contaminated with salmonella. The percentages are even higher for chicken parts (15.4 percent) and ground chicken (25 percent). Campylobacter, too, is allowed in poultry—15.7 percent of samples for whole chickens, 7.7 percent for parts, and 1.9 percent for ground.

The USDA says it set those standards based on "a risk-assessment process that estimates the salmonella and campylobacter percentages needed to meet national public health goals."

Foster Farms says that in 2014—after the outbreak that sickened the Craten family—it took steps to reduce contamination, and committed to limiting salmonella to 5 percent or less of its whole chickens and chicken parts.

The poultry industry overall has invested millions of dollars to improve safety, says Ashley Peterson, PhD, senior vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs at the National Chicken Council, an industry group. And, she says, about 90 percent of chicken processing plants are "meeting and exceeding" present USDA standards for salmonella on whole chickens and chicken parts.

Indeed, last year 8 percent of

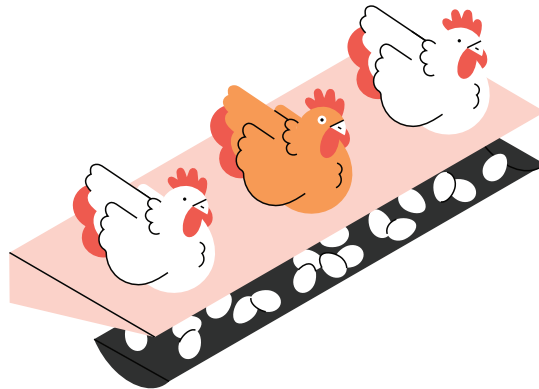
# STOP SICKNESS, STARTING WITH THE EGG

Preventing chickens from being contaminated with salmonella and campylobacter—and from spreading the bacteria to humans—needs to start before chicks are hatched and continue after they have been slaughtered.

## The Hatchery

Breeder hens can spread bacteria to eggs and chicks.

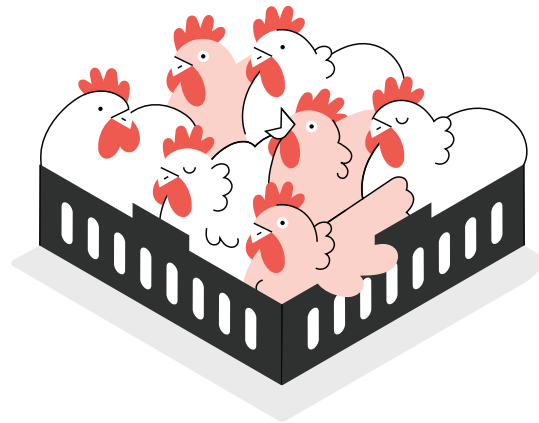
**THE FIXES:**  
1, 2, 3 (at right)



## The Farm

Crowded conditions where chicks are raised create a fertile breeding ground for bacteria.

**THE FIXES:**  
2, 3, 4



## The Processing Plant

Bacteria can spread when chicken is prepped for shipment to grocery stores and elsewhere as whole birds or parts.

**THE FIXES:**  
5, 6, 7



## The Fixes

**1.** Better vaccinate hens against salmonella strains that sicken humans.

**2.** Add probiotics and prebiotics to feed to encourage growth of good bacteria in the chickens' gut.

**3.** Practice scrupulous hygiene: Prevent overcrowding of birds, decontaminate workers' clothing and equipment, limit personnel who handle birds, and keep feed and water clean.

**4.** Isolate birds that carry harmful bacteria.

**5.** Test more birds when they arrive, and reject contaminated ones.

**6.** Improve processing: Cleanly separate intestines from meat, and regularly disinfect defeathering machines, conveyor belts, and other equipment.

**7.** Inspect more slaughtered chicken and destroy meat with dangerous bacteria or send it to facilities that cook chicken before selling it.

chicken samples overall tested by the USDA had salmonella. CR's 2018 tests of chicken had similar results, with 9 percent of the samples testing positive for salmonella, down from 11 percent in 2013.

## ZERO TOLERANCE

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**FOOD SAFETY ADVOCATES** say, however, that even 8 percent translates into a lot of potentially dangerous chicken.

Consider that U.S. farmers produced about 45 billion pounds of chicken in 2020. And if 8 percent were contaminated, that means they distributed about 3.6 billion pounds of salmonella-laden chicken.

That's why CR, along with the

treat with antibiotics. All told, about 1 in 6 salmonella infections and nearly 1 in 3 campylobacter infections are caused by bacteria resistant to antibiotics used to treat serious infections.

"For the most dangerous types of salmonella, the USDA should strive for a zero-tolerance policy," Ronholm says.

That's what the agency did in the 1990s with *E. coli* O157:H7, a deadly strain of the bacteria, designating it an adulterant in ground beef. As a result, beef with that strain can no longer be legally sold. And after that change, the number of people sickened by that type of bacteria was cut almost in half.

Salmonella infections in humans, on the other hand, have remained largely unchanged over the past 20 years. And the percentage of the salmonella

Amanda Craten says. "Unfortunately, I now have to handle chicken like toxic waste," she says. "That's not how I should have to cook in my kitchen."

## HATCH A HEALTHY EGG

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**TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT** of contaminated poultry, advocates say other changes are needed, too, starting long before chickens reach the processing plants.

The vast majority of the roughly 9 billion chickens raised for food in the U.S. each year begin their lives in facilities run by a handful of companies that breed the hens and hatch the eggs. The chicks then go to grow houses until they're ready to be shipped for slaughter, processing, and packaging. Turkeys are produced in a similar way.

Given how consolidated the poultry system is, any bacteria the chicks carry can be widely distributed. One example is a recent outbreak of *Salmonella* hadar linked to ground turkey, says Thomas Gremillion, director of food policy at the Consumer Federation of America. Investigators found evidence of the outbreak across the country. "Where did it come from?" he says.

"Everywhere. And why? Because this highly consolidated, highly integrated system has got problems at the top."

But trying to fix problems at the top, in the hatcheries and farms, is difficult, in part because the USDA's oversight there is limited. The government does have some jurisdiction in those locations, through a branch called the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. But APHIS' focus is animal health, not human health. As a result, those farms more aggressively vaccinate hens against salmonella strains that sicken birds rather than humans.

The USDA's oversight of meat safety doesn't start until the chickens reach

## "I now have to handle chicken like toxic waste. That's not how I should have to cook in my kitchen."

---

—Amanda Craten, whose son Noah suffered long-term brain damage from salmonella in chicken

Center for Science in the Public Interest, the Consumer Federation of America, and Stop Foodborne Illness, recently urged the USDA to lower the percentage of poultry samples allowed to test positive for salmonella and campylobacter. They especially want the agency to more forcefully regulate the most dangerous strains of salmonella. "The focus shouldn't be only on prevalence but also on how many people get ill from a strain and how virulent it is," says Brian Ronholm, CR's director of food policy and a former deputy undersecretary for food safety at the USDA.

Some of the most worrisome strains cause infections that are difficult to

detected in retail chicken resistant to multiple antibiotics has increased, from 15 percent in 2015 to 42 percent in 2020, according to preliminary government data.

For now, the burden of reducing salmonella and campylobacter infections falls heavily on consumers, who are urged to cook poultry thoroughly to kill the pathogens. Peterson at the National Chicken Council told CR that "proper handling and cooking of poultry is the one thing that will eliminate any risk of foodborne illness."

But the responsibility for preventing salmonella and campylobacter infections shouldn't rest on home cooks,



the slaughterhouse, when the agency's Food Safety and Inspection Service enters the scene. But by that point, Ronholm says, "the salmonella is already out of the barn."

Michael Taylor, a former acting undersecretary for food safety at the USDA and a current board member at Stop Foodborne Illness, agrees. "The USDA should have full regulatory authority at the farm. The lack of accountability at that stage is a problem."

Broadening the USDA's authority, though, is unlikely, at least in the short term, because that would require action by Congress. So, Taylor says, processors need to be more demanding of the companies that supply them with the birds.

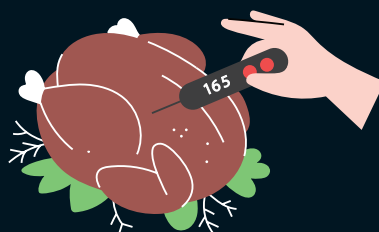
That means, for example, requiring proof that their suppliers vaccinated the birds and included probiotics in their feed, which can help keep bad bacteria from populating their intestines. They should also test more of the chickens when they arrive at the slaughterhouse and reject birds contaminated with dangerous bacteria.

Evidence from the European Union shows that better care for birds results in less bacteria in meat. Between 2005 and 2006, almost a quarter of flocks in the EU tested positive for salmonella; a decade later, after farmers were required to adopt strict hygiene measures, just 3 percent did.

Having chickens arrive at the processing plants healthy might reduce reliance on some controversial practices, such as dipping chicken carcasses in chlorine or other antimicrobial washes, a practice that is banned in the EU.

Processors can do better, too, once birds enter their slaughterhouses. That includes ensuring that workers practice scrupulous hygiene, as well as sterilizing defeathering machines and conveyor belts.

In addition, the FSIS could use its



## 6 ESSENTIAL MEAT SAFETY TIPS

Until regulations change, consumers need to be extra-careful and assume that any type of raw poultry or meat could contain disease-causing bacteria. To stay safe, take these steps while preparing and cooking poultry.

### 1 START AT THE SUPERMARKET

When buying poultry and meat, use a plastic bag (provided by many markets) to keep the juices from spreading to other items in your cart. If it's hot, take an insulated bag and use ice or an ice pack.

### 2 STORE CAREFULLY

Put meat in the fridge or freezer as soon as you get home. Keep it wrapped tightly or store it in containers to prevent its juices from leaking onto other foods. Place it on a bottom shelf. That way, if leakage does occur, it won't spill down onto lower shelves. Clean up any messes quickly.

### 3 THAW SAFELY

Defrost in the refrigerator rather than on the counter. Bacteria multiply fast at temperatures between

40° F and 140° F, and counter-thawed food is likely to reach that danger zone. If you're short on time, you can defrost meat in a microwave.

### 4 DON'T RINSE

"People think they have to wash or rinse chicken before they cook it for many reasons—because their mom did it, they think they need to remove slime or blood, or they think it's safer," says James E. Rogers, PhD, director of food safety research and testing at Consumer Reports. "But that doesn't improve taste and in fact may increase your chances of getting a foodborne illness by splashing bacteria around your sink, countertops, and nearby utensils or dishes." A Department of Agriculture study found that 60 percent of people who washed or rinsed their birds had bacteria in their sink

afterward and that 14 percent still had it there after cleaning the sink. The lesson: Don't rinse your chicken.

### 5 WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN

Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soapy water after each time you handle raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Also remember to scrub hands between food prep and cleanup to avoid spreading bacteria throughout your kitchen or home.

### 6 COOK PROPERLY

"You can't tell whether meat is done by looking at it or touching it," Rogers says. Use a meat thermometer, and cook all poultry—whole, parts, or ground—to 165° F. For beef, pork, and lamb, the safe internal temp is 145° F for roasts, steaks, and chops, and 160° F for ground meat.

authority more aggressively in the processing plants.

Ronholm, for example, says that when companies exceed allowed limits for contaminated poultry, the FSIS essentially gives them a warning by asking them to develop a plan to make corrections.

But each day the problem remains unfixed, more potentially contaminated chicken is distributed. “At the very least, the FSIS should act quickly against these poor-performing plants,” Ronholm says. That could even mean withholding the “USDA Inspected” seal, which would make selling the poultry illegal. “Without a meaningful threat, companies often aren’t motivated to improve as quickly,” he says.

When outbreaks do occur, the USDA should have more power to compel recalls. Currently, it must rely on companies to voluntarily recall their products—and most resist.

One reason recalls are so difficult to trigger is that the USDA must genetically match the bacteria making people sick to a particular product. Such proof is hard to come by because it can require finding an unopened package of meat containing the outbreak strain in the home of an ill person.

Such investigations can also be time-consuming. For example, in October 2013, during the outbreak that sickened the Cratens, CR called for a recall of Foster Farms chicken after we found salmonella matching the outbreak strain in a sample of the company’s chicken. But the chicken was not recalled until July 2014.

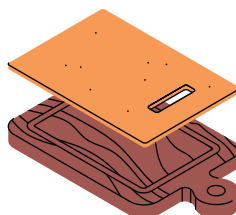
## PROSPECT FOR CHANGE

**NEW LEADERSHIP** at the USDA may signal a willingness to make changes. Sandra Eskin, who became deputy

### CUTTING BOARDS

#### WOOD OR PLASTIC?

**FOOD SAFETY EXPERTS** used to warn against wooden cutting boards, saying they were more likely to harbor bacteria than plastic ones. But newer research shows that both kinds can be safe if you follow three simple tips.



#### USE AT LEAST TWO

Designate one for raw meat, poultry, and fish, and another for fruits and vegetables. That helps prevent cross contamination.

#### CLEAN THOROUGHLY

Wash both types with hot, soapy water. Plastic boards can even go in the dishwasher. Periodically sanitize your boards by flooding the surface with a diluted bleach solution (1 gallon of water mixed with 1 tablespoon of bleach), then rinsing with plain water. Always dry cutting boards completely before storing them so that moisture-loving bacteria have less opportunity to grow.

#### KNOW WHEN TO BUY A NEW BOARD

Over time, any cutting board can develop deep scratches or grooves that may trap bacteria, which could then spread to your food. So swap damaged old boards for new ones.

undersecretary for food safety at the agency earlier this year after decades at public-interest organizations, told CR, “It’s time to reconsider how we can effectively bring down these illnesses by incentivizing measures that reduce contamination all along the farm-to-fork continuum.”

But the poultry industry remains largely resistant to change, especially on the farm.

Mike Robach, a microbiologist and a former executive at Cargill, a global supplier to the poultry industry, says that the focus should remain on processing plants, not in trying to eliminate specific strains of salmonella.

Peterson, at the National Chicken Council, says that “no one wants to reduce [these pathogens] more than the companies producing our food” but that “there is no one silver bullet that will totally eradicate salmonella and campylobacter.”

Ronholm at CR notes that it is in the industry’s best interest to act. “Producers want to put out a good, safe product, and their brand is on the line.”

Indeed, protecting reputation can be a powerful motivator. For example, Foster Farms invested more than \$75 million in food safety after the salmonella outbreak involved in the Cratens’ case.

But it shouldn’t take an outbreak, Ronholm says: “We need more consumers understanding the risks and calling for change, demanding that more be done to eliminate deadly bacteria in our chicken.”

Craten, for one, is ready. Although she participates in programs teaching members of the public how to prepare food safely, she hopes that meat suppliers, government, and safety advocates can act soon to reduce harmful bacteria in meat. Consumers, she says, “shouldn’t have to treat food like a biohazard.”



NEWS & EXPERT  
ADVICE TO  
KEEP YOU  
AHEAD OF  
THE CURVE™

# ROAD REPORT

## TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

### The Simple Fix to Brighten Dim Headlights

Over time, headlights can become yellow or cloudy due to normal exposure to the elements, and that can hinder nighttime visibility. To fix this, either replace your headlight lenses or restore them using a restoration kit (\$10 to \$20). DIY kits help you sand off the old, damaged lens coating and apply a new protective coating. The kits require a bit of elbow grease and sometimes a drill with a sanding disk attachment for buffing. Some body shops will do the restoration for \$75 to \$150, depending on the model. Based on our experience, the hazing effect will eventually return with either method, typically becoming noticeable within a year.

## ASK OUR EXPERTS

### Should I buy my leased vehicle?



If you're at the end of your lease, it could be a smart move to buy the vehicle from your financing company. Most leases include a buyout option at the end of the term for a preset price calculated years earlier, when the agreement was first signed. **That price is likely to be less than your car's retail value today,** with used-car prices up almost 30 percent over the last two years. Normally, a lease buyout hasn't often been a good deal, but a tight supply of vehicles due to a shortage of microchips needed for new cars has increased demand and prices.

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

# \$96

The median dollar amount that CR members saved by haggling over the price of a set of four new tires. Only 14 percent chose to negotiate, but when they did, it resulted in a lower price 70 percent of the time.

Source: Consumer Reports 2020 Tire Brands and Retailers Survey.

## RECALL



### General Motors

GM is recalling 282,429 vehicles from the 2021 model year because of faulty software that could prevent the airbag warning light from working properly. As a result, drivers may think the airbag is working when it's not, potentially leading to inadequate protection in a crash. The recall includes the Buick Envision; Cadillac CT4, CT5, Escalade, and Escalade ESV; Chevrolet Corvette, Tahoe, and Suburban; and GMC Yukon and Yukon XL.

**WHAT TO DO:** Software can be updated "over the air" or at a dealership at no cost. For more information, go to [my.gm.com/recalls](https://my.gm.com/recalls).

FIRST  
DRIVE

### 2022 Honda Civic



The 2022 Civic has shed the blah demeanor of past models, adding agility and nicer interior details. It's also roomier than most compact sedans and better equipped, particularly the top Touring trim.

**CR'S TAKE:** The car makes a strong first impression. The up-level 180-hp, 1.5-liter turbo four-cylinder engine

generates enough off-the-line thrust, and the handling feels responsive for the class, even if the ride skews a bit firm. As with previous model years, it can be challenging to get in and out of this low-slung sedan.

**BASE PRICE RANGE:** \$21,700-\$28,300

**DESTINATION CHARGE:** \$995

**PRICE AS DRIVEN:** \$29,295





# DANGER ON WHEELS

Interest in RVs is booming, but tires for them long known to be risky may still be on the road. Here's what you should do to stay safe.

BY RYAN FELTON ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEN SHMULEVITCH





A

**SALE LISTING** posted online in April for a late-1990s Fleetwood American Tradition motorhome touts the vehicle's

amenities—plenty of storage space, a queen-size bed—and its relatively good condition given its age.

Not mentioned is the make and model of the vehicle's tires: Goodyear G159s—tires linked to hundreds of recreational vehicle crashes over the past 25 years that left at least 95

people dead or injured, according to court records and documents reviewed by Consumer Reports.

The G159 was allegedly not designed to be driven at highway speeds for extended periods because the heat generated could cause tread separation.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which regulates vehicle and tire safety in the U.S., launched an investigation into G159 safety problems in December 2017, more than a decade after the tire went out of production. Lawyers from the Department of Justice's criminal

fraud division were investigating the matter as well, in cooperation with the Department of Transportation's Office of the Inspector General, as recently as mid-2019, and records obtained by CR suggest that probe remains ongoing. But neither NHTSA nor Goodyear have yet issued a recall.

The tale of this long delay reflects deeper concerns with how auto safety is addressed in America.

And with RV sales continuing to boom, even as the pandemic recedes, it's a problem that especially resonates now.



## Hidden Hazards

An attorney for Goodyear attested in court as recently as mid-2017 that the G159 was “still on the road.” Online sale listings for spare tires and RVs reviewed by CR this spring, including on the Fleetwood American Tradition, suggest that remains the case.

Attorneys and consumer advocates say the delayed start in NHTSA’s investigation stems in part from Goodyear’s use of confidential settlements reached in lawsuits over crashes linked to the G159. Those settlements prevented others, including

Goodyear is obligated to notify NHTSA when it learns of a potential safety-related defect. The company has said it doesn’t believe one exists in the G159 and has argued that user error—such as overloading or underinflated tires—is to blame for the crashes.

Goodyear declined to respond to questions from CR, citing the ongoing litigation.

NHTSA declined to specifically comment about the G159 but said that its investigations, which usually take about a year, can be extended

could mask potential dangers from aging tires. Even when they appear to be in decent shape, a tire’s age alone, not just wear to the tread, could pose a serious safety threat. The tires on the Fleetwood identified by CR were manufactured more than 20 years ago.

That some used RVs on the road may be equipped with old G159s is all the more reason for NHTSA to prioritize its investigation into the tire, says Jason Levine, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, an advocacy organization.

“Obviously, a recall earlier in this process would’ve been significantly more impactful,” Levine says. But “the fact that most of [the tires] are off the road doesn’t entirely diminish the utility of a recall.”

“Obviously, a recall earlier in this process would’ve been significantly more impactful.”

—JASON LEVINE

*Executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, an advocacy organization*

NHTSA, from learning about the reported problems sooner.

Indeed, records show Goodyear has settled at least 41 lawsuits stemming from G159-related crashes. NHTSA says its probe of the tire began in December 2017 only because an Arizona attorney, David Kurtz, got Goodyear in one of those cases to produce extensive data on crashes believed to be associated with the G159, and got permission from a judge to give the information to NHTSA.

Yet three years on, the G159 has yet to be recalled—either removed from the market or adequately repaired, with owners notified of the problem.

Many of the known crashes are associated with one specific size of the G159 model line, but NHTSA’s investigation covers all G159 tires designed for a 22.5-inch-diameter rim.

when supplemental materials—such as inspections, tests, and surveys—need to be obtained from a manufacturer.

Defect investigations should not take that long, says William Wallace, manager of safety policy at CR. “Drivers don’t know if they’re at risk, manufacturers can’t properly plan for the future, and NHTSA keeps spending its limited resources on a single issue.”

## The Road to Recall

In March, Goodyear was ordered by a judge to pay about \$520,000 for hiding internal high-speed testing data for the G159 from Kurtz’s clients. The data showed that, at highway speeds, the G159 reached temperatures even Goodyear’s experts have testified could lead to failures like tread separation.

Motorhomes are also used infrequently, NHTSA has said, which

## A Long Battle

Kurtz’s clients were the Haeger family—Leroy and Donna, their son Barry, and his wife, Suzanne—who, in June 2003, were traveling in a 38-foot motorhome when the right front tire abruptly blew out. The motorhome veered off the road and overturned.

Donna suffered multiple fractures and permanent nerve damage that makes eating difficult, according to court documents. Suzanne suffered head trauma and lost 60 percent of her left arm’s function. Leroy ended up with a dislocated elbow and his right leg almost torn apart below the knee. He still experienced chronic pain even after 17 surgeries, the lawsuit said.

By then, Goodyear had received numerous reports of G159 failures, and motorhome manufacturers were raising concerns. In the early 2000s, RV maker Monaco, in partnership with Goodyear, upgraded tires for some customers with G159s following reports of failures and after learning that some users reduced the tire pressure for better comfort.

Shortly before the upgrade, Monaco’s then-director of customer support



# 9 TIPS FOR SAFER RV TRAVEL

RVs range in size from oversized vans to interstate buses. Beyond the sheer scale for these homes on wheels, they are extremely heavy and have limited visibility, making them challenging to drive. But with preparation, practice, and some upgrades, you can improve their overall safety.

## 1. DEVELOP A SAFETY CHECKLIST

Consult this checklist before every trip. This includes observing tire condition and inflation, looking under the hood for problems with belts and hoses, checking oil and other fluids, and verifying that all exterior lights and turn signals are working.

## 2. KEEP PASSENGERS BUCKLED UP

You may have a romantic notion of getting up to make a sandwich while traveling. Don't. Instead, pull over when a passenger wants to go to the kitchen or bathroom.

## 3. BE PROACTIVE ON MAINTENANCE

Many RVs travel significant distances and are then parked for long periods.

The use pattern is quite different from cars, and there can be a temptation to cut corners. Maintain your vehicle according to the schedule recommended by the manufacturer. The cost for this will save you in the long run.

## 4. REPLACE OLDER TIRES

Regardless of how much wear or use they have, Consumer Reports recommends replacing tires at 10 years old from date of manufacture, or sooner if specified in the vehicle owner's manual.

## 5. ADD TIRE PRESSURE MONITORS

It is wise to invest in tire pressure monitors that can warn of problems before they become disasters. There are several

products made specifically for RVs, with different levels of specificity ("low" vs. psi readout, for example). The better systems involve fitting a sensor inside the tire and have a remote digital display of tire pressure.

## 6. BALANCE THE WEIGHT IN YOUR RV

This will improve handling and reduce tire wear. It should be loaded based on weight capacity and distribution, including the weight of towed vehicles or trailers, cargo in the basement storage, and water in the tanks. For loading details specific to your vehicle, refer to the owner's manual that came with your RV.

## 7. SECURE BELONGINGS

All items should be stowed when driving to

make sure they don't move about the interior when you're in motion.

## 8. PRACTICE DRIVING IT

Operating an RV is very different from driving a car or pickup truck. So it's important to practice driving. Each type has its own quirks, such as braking distances, roof clearance, and turning radius. Start in an empty parking lot with cones. And ask your retailer about classes.

## 9. GET A BACKUP CAMERA

If your RV isn't equipped with a backup camera, add one. And when reversing, have a passenger stand outside with a handheld radio to watch for dangers that could be in your blind zones.

analyzed internal reports associated with more than 500 motorhomes sold with G159s and found that 72 of the vehicles—14 percent—had a tire failure, according to court documents.

In 2005, Kurtz took Goodyear to court on behalf of the Haegers, beginning a legal battle that's still ongoing. Along the way, he learned that Goodyear originally designed the G159 for regional delivery trucks, according to a 2017 letter he later submitted to NHTSA. But the company sold it to motorhome manufacturers, claiming it was

suitable for highway speeds. By NHTSA's estimate, about 40,000 G159s may have been installed on RVs.

Kurtz alleged that the G159 was prone to fail if it became unusually hot, and sought records from Goodyear to show whether that was the case. The Haegers agreed to settle the case in 2010.

### An Unreasonable Risk

Shortly after, however, Kurtz read an article about a separate G159-related case in Florida, in which Goodyear provided the exact testing data he'd been seeking, according

to court filings. Kurtz went back to the judge overseeing the Haeger case and asked her to sanction Goodyear and its attorneys for failing to turn over the data to him.

The judge sharply criticized the company in a scathing 66-page ruling. "The troubling behavior by Goodyear and its counsel began almost immediately after the case was filed and continued throughout the entire litigation," she wrote in the 2012 order.

Kurtz then filed a separate lawsuit that uncovered more data—in particular, that Goodyear had hundreds of reports of motorhome owners filing claims after experiencing G159-related failures, and that almost 100 people died or were injured in crashes.

"These failures were all occurring at highway speed," never at low speeds, Kurtz says. Since implementation in 2000 of the TREAD Act, automotive and tire companies must report to NHTSA, on a quarterly basis, all injuries, deaths, and related incidents caused by a possible defect. Goodyear did report a handful of G159-related incidents that occurred after that date, but many of the crashes happened earlier, NHTSA has said.

That didn't excuse Goodyear from legal requirements to alert NHTSA of a potential safety-related defect, per the agency's rules. The agency defines those defects as problems that pose "an unreasonable risk to motor vehicle safety," such as "critical vehicle components that break, fall apart, or separate from the vehicle," causing potential loss of control or injury.

"From the time the first tire was introduced into interstate commerce to the present, Goodyear remained under a continuing obligation to report the existence of a safety-related defect in its

**"The troubling behavior by Goodyear and its counsel began almost immediately after the case was filed and continued throughout the entire litigation."**

—ROSALYN SILVER

*Federal judge overseeing the Haeger case*



► Four members of the Haeger family were seriously injured when their motorhome with Goodyear G159 tires crashed.



product to NHTSA,” wrote Heidi King, then-acting administrator of NHTSA, in a June 2018 letter to a congressperson asking about the G159 investigation.

## Deceptive Practice

CR’s Wallace says the situation underscores the risks of companies utilizing confidential agreements to settle litigation over alleged defects.

In 2014, for example, a major scandal erupted over a faulty ignition switch that General Motors used in many small cars. The switch could shut off a car when it was in motion, preventing airbags from inflating. The defect was ultimately implicated in at least 174 deaths.

The automaker was blasted by federal lawmakers over signing confidential settlements in lawsuits about the ignition switch, which prevented disclosure of the defect for years until a recall was eventually conducted.

“It’s unconscionable to keep public health or safety dangers hidden from the public,” says Wallace. “Secret settlements that leave people in the dark about vehicles, equipment, or other products that could hurt them should be banned nationwide in all but the most unusual circumstances.”

Congress held a hearing over the GM ignition switch, and the company signed a deferred prosecution agreement in 2015 with the Department of Justice, paying \$900 million to voluntarily settle criminal charges over the matter.

Attorney Kurtz believes similar action against Goodyear is merited.

In Kurtz’s 2017 letter to NHTSA, he asked the agency to enforce penalties against the company for failing to take action on the G159 sooner. Kurtz said that NHTSA had asked Goodyear to turn over crash data associated with the G159 in the mid-2000s as part of a separate investigation into a motorhome tire made by a competitor. But Kurtz said his review suggests the company disclosed a fraction of the crashes it knew of.

Kurtz argued that the evidence

**“Secret settlements that leave people in the dark about vehicles, equipment, or other products that could hurt them should be banned nationwide.”**

—WILLIAM WALLACE

*Consumer Reports, manager of safety policy*

provides a clear reason to recall the G159, and he urged NHTSA to refer the case to the Department of Justice. “I believe there is a vast documented record of deception and misrepresentation by Goodyear to its customers as well as those who were hurt by G159 tread separations about the safety of the G159,” he wrote.

## Seeking Transparency

Courts have held that automotive companies are still responsible for conducting a recall even if few models with the defect are still on the road.

In 1977, a federal appellate panel rejected an argument by General Motors that it was not required to take action over a faulty carburetor in 1965 and 1966 Chevrolet and Buick models that the automaker admitted to be defective and had caused numerous engine fires.

The company’s argument? So much time had passed that the likelihood of additional instances was low. The court didn’t buy it.

“The fact remains that some of these cars continue to be driven and that, according to General Motors, some ‘negligible’ number of them will burst into flames in the future,” the court wrote. “Some drivers of 1965 Chevrolets and 1966 Chevrolets and Buicks face not simply an unreasonable risk of carburetor failures—but a virtual certainty.”

For Goodyear, what comes of NHTSA’s

investigation into the G159 remains to be seen. Levine, of the Center for Auto Safety, says the public has a right to learn the full scope. “Goodyear has, through use of the legal system, and with a prolonged silence from the federal government, kept important safety information from the public,” he says. “And that’s unfortunate.”

## Safety Steps

Because RVs are used infrequently, experts strongly advise anyone considering buying an older motorhome to watch out for tires like the G159. They could very well still be on the road. (You can find how old your tires are by reading the Department of Transportation code on the sidewall.)

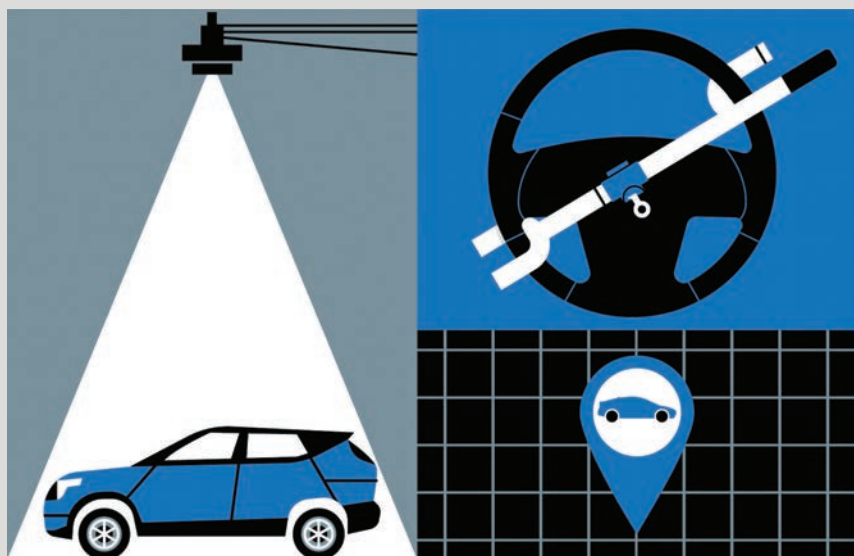
Arizona resident Mark Salem—a certified master automobile technician who teaches RV safety classes at his shop—found this out recently when he helped a friend inspect a motorhome for possible purchase. The inspection went fine, until Salem pulled the metal cover off the spare tire attached to the back of the vehicle. It was a G159.

Salem has personal experience with the G159 and testified as a vehicular expert in the Haeger case: Three of them failed on motorhomes he drove more than two decades ago.

With a tire that old, especially one associated with numerous crashes, Salem says he offered clear instructions to his friend: “You need to take this off.”



## How to Prevent Car Thefts



**CAR THEFTS INCREASED** 9.2 percent last year, according to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, an industry membership organization. The NICB says economic stress due to the pandemic and social and public safety resource limitations may have helped drive the increase.

Lt. Bruce Hosea, an auto theft specialist with the Los Angeles Police Department, tells CR that much of the increase in thefts they've seen involves cars deemed easy marks by criminals—older models without anti-theft technology and cars with keys or fobs left inside. At the same time, police say some thieves have become more tech-savvy, using electronic tools to steal vehicles without damaging windows, locks, or steering columns.

Below are tips on how to keep your car from becoming a target and how to save on insurance in the process.

### SMART PARKING

Simple habits can make a big difference. Never leave your unattended vehicle unlocked or running, and try to park in busy, **well-lit areas**. "The overwhelming majority of vehicle thefts and burglaries are a result of unlocked vehicle doors," says Crystal Clark, a spokesperson for the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in Florida. Double-check that you have the key or fob with you, and **stow valuables out of sight** to discourage smash-and-grab thefts.

### ADD LOCKS AND ALARMS

Police say visible **steering wheel locks**, such as The Club and Disklok, work well as deterrents, and **adding an aftermarket alarm system**, which often includes a visible blinking red light, can be a good idea for older vehicles without built-in systems.

Auto security company Voxx Electronics Corp. says alarms usually cost \$300 to \$700, plus \$200 to \$600 for professional installation, depending on features and the system. Alarms can also be added to new cars.

### INSTALL LIGHTS AT HOME

Lighting can be an effective theft deterrent, especially if you park in your driveway, says Captain Martin Rodriguez of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. He recommends **motion detection lights**, which can startle a would-be thief and alert those at home.

**Doorbell cameras**, such as Google Nest Hello and Ring, can help police identify suspects. Also remember to **store keys in the house**. Never leave them in the car or garage.

### TRACK YOUR CAR

Aftermarket tracking systems won't prevent theft, but they can help find your car after the fact. Some **basic GPS devices** plug into your vehicle's computer port, but they can also be easily removed. More complex, integrated systems, such as LoJack, require professional installation. Some recent car models provide tracking through **subscription-based services**. For example, GM's OnStar offers a plan that costs \$30 per month with stolen vehicle assistance.

### SAVE ON INSURANCE

Some insurance companies offer discounts for cars with anti-theft devices, usually up to **15 percent off** comprehensive coverage. The discount can vary based on where you live and the insurer, says Loretta Worters, vice president at the Insurance Information Institution. Worters says outfitting your vehicle with an **alarm, GPS tracking, and a hidden ignition kill switch** that prevents the car from starting, even with a key, can often qualify you for a discount.



## ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS  
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S  
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER



SMALL SUVs

### Hyundai Tucson

A Stylish Step Forward

80

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 86

**HIGHS** Handling, ride, braking, roomy interior, controls

**LOWS** Slow acceleration

**POWERTRAIN** 187-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 26 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$24,950–\$37,350 base price range  
\$31,969 as tested

**THE BOLDLY STYLED** Tucson addresses many shortcomings of its mediocre predecessor, offering a smoother ride, sharper handling, and a quieter cabin. It now outshines several compact SUV mainstays, including the Nissan Rogue and Toyota RAV4.

We found the cabin particularly well done, with quality materials and a slick, upscale appearance. The new 8-inch infotainment touch screen has large, simple-to-decipher icons and features standard wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

The driving position delivers a commanding view along with plenty of headroom and well-placed armrests. But the plastic center console intrudes on the driver's right knee space. The front seats are flat, firm, and supportive, and our midlevel SEL came with heated seats, unlike some competitors' comparable models. The rear

seat rivals the Honda CR-V and Subaru Forester, with lots of head- and kneeroom and plenty of foot space under the front seats.

The steering has a natural, well-weighted feel, and the Tucson proved responsive and engaging on back roads. It's also one of the more comfortable-riding compact SUVs, and the cabin is relatively quiet.

The base 187-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder is the weak spot. With a 0 to 60 mph time of 9.6 seconds, it's slower than most competitors. The eight-speed automatic transmission shifts too often keeping up with driver demands, but at least it operates smoothly. The Tucson's 26 mpg overall lags the Forester and CR-V.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, LDW, LKA, and automatic high beams are standard. BSW became standard with July production.



SMALL SUVs

### Mitsubishi Outlander

Big Improvements, but Still Flawed

65

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 71

**HIGHS** Standard third row, transmission, controls

**LOWS** Ride, darty steering, wind noise, acceleration

**POWERTRAIN** 181-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 25 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$25,795–\$35,345 base price range  
\$34,340 as tested

**MITSUBISHI—WITH HELP** from its corporate partner Nissan—has redesigned the beleaguered Outlander for the 2022 model year.

Although the new version is much improved, it still trails other small SUV entries in ride quality and refinement, including the Rogue, the popular Nissan SUV that the Outlander is based on.

The Outlander gets off the line quickly, but overall acceleration from the 181-hp four-cylinder is underwhelming after that, barely breaking 10 seconds from 0 to 60 mph. Steering is light with an unnaturally quick turn-in response, which makes the SUV feel nervous and busy on highways, where even small steering corrections have a large impact. We were even less impressed with how the Outlander smacks harshly over bumps, thanks in part to its large 20-inch wheels.

The cabin might otherwise be considered quiet if not for the loud wind noise seeping in from the sunroof.

Fit and finish is quite good, with plenty of padded pieces, and we liked the grippy and supportive suede seats. The second-row seat is comfortable, with lots of leg- and footroom. The third-row seat, unique for the class, is tiny. Plus, the head restraints restrict the driver's view through the rear window, and they can't be folded down as with many SUVs; they have to be fully removed instead.

Most controls are easy to use, except the electronic gear selector. Shaped like a joystick, it has unintuitive labeling that implies you should pull the lever toward you to shift from Park to Reverse, but you really should push it forward.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, and RCTW come standard.


**MINIVANS**

## Kia Carnival

A Pleasing  
Family Van

**76**
**OVERALL  
SCORE**
**ROAD-TEST SCORE 89**

**HIGHS** Smooth powertrain, braking, interior room, controls

**LOWS** Agility, removing second-row seats for cargo space is a chore

**POWERTRAIN** 290-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

**FUEL** 21 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$32,100–\$46,100 base price range  
\$39,470 as tested

**KIA'S ROOMY AND** refined Carnival—the automaker's replacement for the Sedona—did so well in our testing that it notched the highest road-test score among currently available minivans.

The Carnival's 290-hp V6 has plenty of usable power, and the refined driving experience is aided by a smooth-shifting eight-speed automatic. Like its V6 rivals, the Carnival's 21 mpg overall is far outmatched by the Toyota Sienna hybrid's 36 mpg. And all-wheel drive isn't available, unlike with the Sienna and Chrysler Pacifica.

Although the Carnival has relatively slow steering and noticeable body roll through turns, it felt balanced and controlled through our avoidance maneuver, which simulates swerving quickly to avoid a vehicle or obstacle on the road. Its suspension takes the edge off bumps nicely, and

the cabin stays quiet, though there was some extra wind noise from the side windows at highway speeds.

The Carnival's front seats are wide and supportive, and the second-row seats allow for lots of headroom, though thigh support is a bit lacking. The seats are also heavy and a chore to remove when looking for maximum cargo space. The fairly roomy third row is comfortable.

Controls are mostly easy to use, though the capacitive-touch climate "buttons" aren't as straightforward to press as physical ones. The controls for the side doors and liftgate are inconveniently placed on the lower left of the driver's dash instead of on the overhead console, so they're impossible for the front passenger to reach.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, and LKA come standard.

**SPORTS CARS**

## Chevrolet Corvette

Breathtaking  
Performance

**68**
**OVERALL  
SCORE**
**ROAD-TEST SCORE 97**

**HIGHS** Acceleration, handling, braking, transmission, fit and finish

**LOWS** Access, rear and side visibility

**POWERTRAIN** 495-hp, 6.2-liter V8 engine; 8-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission; rear-wheel drive

**FUEL** 19 mpg on premium

**PRICE**  
\$59,900–\$78,850 base price range  
\$77,680 as tested

**WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION** we finally bought and tested the redesigned Corvette Stingray, with its new rear/midengine layout—a configuration long favored by Ferrari, Lamborghini, and other exotic sports car companies. We're impressed by the Corvette's performance numbers and thrilled with its fun-to-drive nature. But despite a super-high road-test score, we can't recommend the new Corvette because of its—and Chevrolet's—inconsistent reliability history.

Showcased under the glass rear hatch sits a 6.2-liter V8. There's no turbocharger or hybrid electric assist here, just 495 unadulterated horsepower coupled with an eight-speed dual-clutch automatic that ticks off shifts in rapid-fire manner. The thunderous engine sounds glorious. We clocked the Corvette at 3.4 seconds from

0 to 60 mph, besting the Tesla Model S P85D as the quickest car we've ever tested.

Handling agility is superb, thanks to immediate turn-in response from the near-telepathic steering and barely a trace of body roll. Our 'Vette was so controllable at its limits that it shouldn't scare off less skilled drivers. Even with its otherworldly performance, the ride from the optional adaptive suspension system is civilized in the Tour setting.

As with other sports cars, there are compromises. It's so low that getting in and out could count as your daily yoga routine. Side and rear visibility are practically nonexistent. And the long line of climate-control buttons perched on a ledge are difficult to use.

We're dismayed that FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection aren't available, and that BSW and RCTW aren't standard on all trims.



**Ratings** ➤ **Major Transformations** This month we highlight two much-improved compact SUVs, a thoroughly redesigned minivan, and the mighty midengine Corvette.

Make + Model		Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results												Active Safety Features			
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Seat comfort front / rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + Finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	Suitcases + duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW
SUVs \$25,000-\$35,000																				
✓	Subaru Forester 2.5L	89	⬆	⬆	90	28	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	53.0	9.2	130	36.5	S	S	S	0
✓	Mazda CX-5 2.5L	83	⬆	⬆	78	24	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	54.0	8.6	133	30.5	S	S	S	S
✓	Honda CR-V 1.5T	82	⬆	⬆	82	28	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	52.0	8.2	137	36.0	S	S	S	0
✓	Hyundai Tucson 2.5L	80	⬆	⬆	86	26	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	53.0	9.6	130	38.5	S	S	-	S
✓	Kia Sportage 2.4L	80	⬆	⬆	78	23	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	52.5	9.6	128	29.5	S	S	-	0
✓	Nissan Rogue 2.5L	76	⬆	⬆	80	25	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	53.5	8.7	135	36.5	S	S	S	S
✓	Toyota RAV4 2.5L	69	⬆	⬆	72	27	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	54.0	8.3	131	30.5	S	S	S	0
	Volkswagen Tiguan 2.0T	65	⬆	⬆	84	25	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	52.0	10.3	131	33.0	S	S	S	S
	Mitsubishi Outlander 2.5L	65	⬆	⬆	71	25	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	51.0	9.8	133	32.0	S	S	S	S
	Ford Bronco Sport 1.5T	60	⬆	⬆	75	25	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	53.5	8.9	126	30.5	S	S	S	S
	Ford Escape 1.5T	46	⬆	⬆	73	26	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	53.0	8.9	128	30.5	S	S	S	S
MINIVANS																				
✓	Toyota Sienna 2.5H	77	⬆	⬆	80	36	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	50.0	8.2	148	48.0	S	S	S	S
✓	Kia Carnival 3.5L	76	⬆	⬆	89	21	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	52.0	8.4	129	72.0	S	S	-	S
	Honda Odyssey 3.5L	68	⬆	⬆	85	22	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	50.0	8.1	136	71.5	S	S	S	0
	Chrysler Pacifica 3.6L	68	⬆	⬆	85	21	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	51.0	8.0	136	66.0	S	S	S	S
SPORTS CARS \$45,000 AND UP																				
✓	BMW M240i 3.0T	88	⬆	⬆	98	25	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	58.5	5.2	115	2+0	S	S	0	0
✓	Porsche 718 Boxster 2.0T	83	⬆	⬆	95	26	⬆ / -	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	59.0	4.4	108	1+2	0	-	-	0
✓	Toyota Supra 3.0T	83	⬆	⬆	91	27	⬆ / -	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	56.0	4.6	115	1+1	S	S	0	0
✓	BMW Z4 2.0T	79	⬆	⬆	86	29	⬆ / -	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	56.0	6.1	111	1+2	S	S	0	0
✓	Ford Mustang 5.0L	76	⬆	⬆	84	19	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	54.5	4.9	121	2+1	0	0	0	0
✓	Audi TT 2.0T	73	⬆	⬆	84	26	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	58.0	6.3	113	1+2	-	-	-	S
	Chevrolet Corvette 6.2L	68	⬆	⬆	97	19	⬆ / -	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	58.5	3.4	113	0+3	-	-	-	0
>	Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at <a href="https://www.cars.com">CR.org/cars</a> . When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.																			

**HOW WE TEST:** Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score**, which factors in **road-test results**, **predicted reliability**, **owner satisfaction**, and

**advanced safety**, which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as forward collision warning, automatic

emergency braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. — means no such safety system is offered; 0 means that it's optional on at least some trim levels;

S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

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# Signs of the Times

Some days you just can't believe what you're seeing!

## For Mature Babies Only

Books for those super-early readers in your life.  
Submitted by Jordan Levine, via email



## Did Virtual Learning Drive You to Drink?

A very weird school shopping list: pens, pencils, textbooks, and a bottle of wine, too.  
Submitted by W. Fernhead, via email



## Now This Is Eating Light

We hope this is just a mistake and not the latest diet craze.  
Submitted by Robert Werkema, seen in Grand Rapids, MI



## Pricier by the Dozen

Sometimes you save when you buy in bulk, and sometimes ... you don't.  
Submitted by Scott Lerner, Dallas



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